

# David of Sassoun

## *Sasunts'i Davit'*

*Armenian Folk Epic*

Artin K. Shalian, translator

Erevan, 1939, English translation New York, 1964

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Prepared by Robert Bedrosian, 2009

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# David of Sassoun

## *Sanasar and Baghdasar*

### Part I

#### *Battle against the Khalif of Baghdad*

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1.

[Page 4] Again, I pray for mercy  
On Dzovinar Khanum,  
Again, I pray for mercy  
On Sanasar and Baghdasar,  
Again, I pray for mercy on Kerry T oros,  
Again, I pray for mercy  
On the parents of the listeners of this tale.

2.

[5] In the beginning there was a pagan Khalif;  
There was also an Armenian king named Gagik.  
The pagan Khalif had his seat in Baghdad,  
And King Gagik had his seat in Berd-Gaboud.  
King Gagik was aged and hoary;  
He had great riches, but no heirs, no sons,  
Only a daughter, Dzovinar Khanum,  
Who was very fair.

In those days, the mightier king  
Took tribute from other kings.  
The Khalif of Baghdad, mighty and powerful,  
Gathered his army, attacked and plundered our land,  
Carried off vast booty, took many into captivity,  
Slaughtered countless men, decimated our race.  
The Armenian king, Gagik, became then  
A vassal of the Khalif of Baghdad.  
One day the Khalif called  
Two of his tax collectors and said to them:  
—Go, collect and bring the tribute that is due me.  
The tax collectors went to Gaboud Berd,  
And were at the gate of the king's palace  
When they saw a dazzling light.  
They looked, and what did they see?  
They saw a maiden so fair and beautiful  
That she could say to the sun:  
—Shine not, O sun,

I will shine in your stead.  
[6] The maiden was as beautiful  
As the fortnightly moon  
That rises beyond seven mountains.  
When the tax collectors saw the maiden,  
They swooned and lay helpless, dazzled by her beauty.  
In an hour King Gagik sent his men,  
Who came and carried them to his palace.

Saying not a word, asking for nothing,  
The two men departed quietly,  
Returned to Baghdad, went before their Khalif.  
—Did you bring any tribute? the Khalif asked.  
—Long may the King live, the two men replied.  
What tribute would you need?  
We saw something so beautiful!  
It is a wonder that we did not die.  
Were you in our place, believe us,  
You would have swooned  
And lay helpless for three months.  
—What did you see? the Khalif asked.  
—May your House abound with God's blessings, they said.  
What would you do with more riches, treasures and goods?  
You have much gold, silver, and priceless gems.  
But that cross-worshipping Armenian King  
Has such a daughter!  
A maiden so fair,  
A maiden who is worth all you have.  
It was that heavenly maiden whom we saw, O Khalif.  
[Had you seen her yourself,]  
You would not eat, you would not drink for days and nights,  
But only feast on her grace and beauty.  
Possessed with the desire to have the maiden,  
The pagan Khalif sent word to the Armenian king:  
—Give your daughter to me.  
King Gagik replied:—I am an Armenian, you are an Arab;  
I am a cross-worshipper, you are a pagan.  
How can I give my daughter to you?

[7] I will never give my daughter to you.  
The Khalif said: —King Gagik,  
Give her amicably, or you will give her forcibly.  
If you do not give your daughter amicably,  
I will enslave, slaughter your people,  
Devastate your domain, ravage your city,  
Destroy your throne, capture your crown.  
Gagik said: —I will fight, I will not give her to you.

3.

The Khalif issued then a call to arms:  
—Hi, ho, soldiers, march on, invade Gagik's land.

If he gives the maiden to me, it is well. If he does not,  
Plunder and devastate the land.  
Leave no stone standing, sift the sand,  
And bring back all the booty.  
The Khalif's army marched on,  
Came to the land of the Armenian king.  
—O King, they said,  
Give your daughter to our Khalif. If you do not,  
We will devastate your land,  
Leave no stone standing, sift the sand,  
Plunder and carry away all you possess.

King Gagik looked over the encampment of the enemy.  
And what did he see!  
An army as numerous as the stars in heaven.  
They fought. Many soldiers [in both armies] were killed.  
The cross-worshipping King was defeated.

Dzovinar Khanum, watching from the roof,  
Thought to herself: —If my father were wise,  
He would not lay at my door so much blood and suffering.  
He would give me [to the Khalif].

[8] Because of me they will kill all these people;  
Their children, orphaned, will curse me.  
In the end they will take me by force.  
It is better that I go to him willingly,  
To save my people and my father's kingdom.  
Maiden Dzovinar went to her father's council chamber  
And asked:  
—Father, what are you contemplating?  
Her father replied:  
—This army has come to take you away.  
Either you will go to the Khalif,  
Or he will devastate our land, subjugate my kingdom,  
And enslave and kill our people.  
[But] How can I give you, my daughter, to him?  
He is an Arab, I am an Armenian.  
Dzovinar Khanum said:  
—If I do not marry the pagan king,  
He will kill our people.  
It is better that I go to him;  
No one should suffer.  
Let me be the only one to die in my father's kingdom.  
I am a single soul. I would rather go and perish  
Than let our land, Armenia, be laid waste  
And thousands and thousands be killed.  
Then Dzovinar Khanum said:  
—Father, give me to the Khalif.

King Gagik summoned a council to decide  
Whether to give Dzovinar to the Khalif or not.  
They summoned the Queen's father,

Who was the bishop of Vartbadrig. He came.  
They summoned Kerry [maternal uncle] Toros. He came.  
The king summoned his court.  
He held council and asked:

[9] —Shall we give our maiden to the Khalif willingly,  
Or shall we fight?

What would you advise me to do?

One of them said: —We are not strong enough to fight;

It is only a maiden, let us give her to the Khalif.

Another said: —No, we will fight.

We should rather die

Than give our maiden to a pagan king.

[He was upholding the national honor.]

Toros, who was seventeen-eighteen years old,

Realizing that the counsellors,

In honor to their king, were determined to fight

Rather than give the maiden to the Khalif,

Said: —Long may the King live,

I know the counsellors would rather fight

Than give the maiden to the Khalif;

It is better to sacrifice a maiden

Than have a nation perish.

Heed my counsel, my lord,

Give the maiden to the Khalif.

We are not strong enough to fight.

Let us pretend that you have not had a daughter.

The council deliberated;

The bishop agreed with Kerry Toros. [He said:]

—Shall we let a nation perish

For the sake of a single soul?

No, let that single soul be sacrificed.

King Gagik did not want to sacrifice his daughter.

Realizing that he had no other choice,

He agreed to give Dzovinar [to the pagan king].

Word was sent to the Khalif:

—Yes, we will give the maiden to you. Come and take her.

After great preparations the Khalif with his wedding guests

Came to King Gagik to take the maiden.

Dzovinar went to her father and said:

[10] —Father, ask the Khalif to build a separate palace for me.

And allow me to live there.

Tell him he is not to come near me

Nor to my bed for one year.

Father, I ask you to send with me a priest

To hold service in the morning and the evening,

So that I can pray and keep our faith.

Send also a handmaiden with me.

Tell my wishes to the Khalif,

So that he will fulfill them.

King Gagik told the Khalif what his daughter wished.  
—Khalif, said Gagik, I will not fight against you,  
But I will make these terms with you:  
When I give my daughter to you,  
[To take her to Baghdad],  
A priest must go with her,  
So that she may pray to her God, worship her cross,  
While you worship your own idols.  
You will build a separate palace for her,  
You will not go near her  
Nor to her bed for one year.  
The pagan king said:  
—My Lord, I will make peace  
And come to terms with you.  
If you give your daughter to me,  
No more shall I take any tribute from you.  
Let her bear my name,  
Let people say that I am the son-in-law  
Of the Armenian king. That will do for me.  
I vow that, not only for one, but for seven years,  
I will not go near her.  
You can send with her a serving maid and a priest.  
When you give the maiden to me,  
I will take her to Baghdad  
And build for her a pavilion facing my palace.  
The maiden will remain in her own faith,  
[11] I will remain in my own.  
Am I not an Arab? Are you not an Armenian?

4.

The pagan king was camping at Deghdis;  
King Gagik was staying at the plain of Norakegh,  
Where he had his summer palace  
Among pastures and meadows  
Full of sweet, fragrant flowers.  
Here, too, was Gatnov Aghbiur [Milk Fountain]  
Where they pitched their tents  
And held the wedding feast for seven days.

[Before the wedding] Dzovinar went to her father  
And said: —My royal father,  
Tomorrow is the Day of Ascension; give me leave  
To go to Hilly for an outing at the springs.  
Let me take ten of my companions with me.  
We will feast, make merry  
And roam the countryside;  
In the evening we will return home.  
The King gave his consent and said:  
—Go, have your outing and return.  
Dzovinar with her handmaiden and companions  
Went for an outing at Gatnov Aghbiur.  
They roamed the countryside till sundown.

She saw then that there is a world  
Full of light, teeming with life,  
Everyone at work;  
Some watering their land, some tending their sheep;  
Others ploughing their fields.

Dzovinar then thought to herself:  
[12]—I did not know there were so many people  
Vibrant with the joy of life.  
They climbed to the top of a hill;  
There they rested and feasted on the green;  
Then they roamed around, sighted Gaboud Dzov ["Blue Lake"/Lake Van],  
And went to the shore to watch the lake.

Toward evening, when it was time to return home,  
Dzovinar said to her companions:  
—Go, take a stroll, roam around, and make merry,  
While I go for a drink of water.  
Lost in deep thoughts, she walked along the shore  
Until she reached a rocky point. There she stopped,  
Watched the lake and saw nothing but water without end.  
Dzovinar and her maid then sat at the shore and wept.  
She was weary from walking;  
Her handmaiden had become very thirsty;  
Dzovinar had become very thirsty, too. She said:  
—The water of this lake is very salty.  
Ah, if I only had a drop of water  
To drink and quench my thirst.  
The handmaiden searched hard but found no water.  
Dzovinar then invoked:  
—Raise a spring here, O God,  
And guide me through Your light.  
By God's will the lake parted then,  
A spring of sweet water appeared.  
In the pool near the bank she saw a big rock  
And a spring of sweet water gushing from the rock.  
Water surrounded the rock;  
No one, without disrobing,  
Could reach the spring to drink its water;  
Dzovinar took off her garments, swam to the spring.  
She cupped her hands and drank a cupped handful  
And half-a-cupped handful of water  
[13] From that life-giving (*anmahagan*: "immortal") spring;  
The spring then went dry.  
She conceived from the water  
That she drank at the spring.

Getting her companions together,  
She then returned home  
To her father, King Gagik.

The Khalif's army departed in the morning.  
King Gagik gave a dowry to his daughter,  
And with attendants sent her



To the city of the pagan Khalif.  
The Khalif was overjoyed on her arrival;  
He held a wedding feast for seven days and seven nights.  
Then he built a separate palace for Dzovinar,  
Sent food and drink to her  
And ordered her: —You will not leave the palace.  
Dzovinar Khanum retired within seven chambers,  
Locked her seven doors, went into mourning.

5.

As time passed,  
Dzovinar realized that she was pregnant.  
She knew that she had conceived from the water  
[That she had drunk at the lake].  
But she did not reveal this to the Khalif.  
When the Khalif heard that she was pregnant,  
He said: —It is not from my seed.  
He then summoned his vizier and said:  
—You would not believe that this could happen;  
What shall we do, vizier?  
The vizier said: —Long may the King live,  
[14] Let us put her to death.  
They ordered the executioner:  
—Go, cut her head off.  
The headsman came to Dzovinar and said to her:  
—The king has ordered me to cut off your head.  
Dzovinar Khanum said: —Has your Khalif no justice?  
Does he not know that by putting to death  
A pregnant woman  
He is taking two lives at once?  
Go tell the Khalif to wait until I bear my child,  
Until we see what sort of a child it is;  
Then he may have my head cut off.  
If you want to know, she said,  
I was a virgin when I left my father's home;  
I am still a virgin.  
By the will of God my child was conceived of the water  
That I drank at the lake.  
The headsman returned to the Khalif  
And told him all that his wife,  
Dzovinar Khanum, had said.  
The vizier said to the Khalif:  
—Dzovinar Khanum has spoken truthfully;  
Let us wait until the child is born,  
Then we will have her head cut off.  
They decided to wait until the birth of the child.  
The Khalif said: —Do not go near her.  
As she has requested we will wait until the child is born.  
Remember, I am her lord, Dzovinar is my wife.  
Do not meddle.

They waited.  
Nine months, nine days, nine hours,  
And nine minutes passed;  
Dzovinar's time was fulfilled:  
She gave birth to twin boys.  
One was a big child, one was a small child.  
Priest Melkiset came  
[15] And baptized the boys over the *tendour*.  
The big child he named Sanasar,  
The small child he named Baghdasar.

Word was taken to the Khalif:  
—You have twin boys.  
The twin boys grew in a day as much as  
Other children grew in a year.  
When the Khalif saw the twin boys,  
His eyes were blinded.  
He ordered: —Tell the headsman  
To go and cut off their mother's head.  
The headsman went to Dzovinar and said:  
—I have come to cut off your head.  
Dzovinar Khanum said to the headsman:  
—Has your king no regard for laws?  
How will they nurse the twin boys  
When he has my head cut off?  
Let him wait until my sons grow.  
Then he can have my head cut off.  
I cannot escape from this place.

The headsman went to the Khalif  
And told him what Dzovinar said.  
The Khalif then summoned the vizier and asked:  
—What do you advise me to do?  
The vizier said: —Wait for ten years until the boys grow,  
Then we will have her head cut off.  
Where can she escape from this place?  
Hold them prisoners.  
They should not come out of the palace.

They stayed inside the palace for six months.  
[16] Dzovinar then sent word to the Khalif:  
—Am I a bird that you have caged me?  
Am I a prisoner that you have jailed me  
And do not let me out of this palace?  
[I and my boys], we see the sun and catch the light  
Only through the ceiling-window.  
The Khalif said: —She is right;  
Let them come out, let them go for a walk.  
The guard opened the gates;  
And they went out for a walk.

Time passed.  
The lads grew day by day.  
At one year of age, they were as big as

Other children who were five years old.  
They would come out, play with other children,  
Strike them, hurt them, and make them cry.  
By the time they were five or six years of age,  
Sanasar and Baghdasar had grown to be husky lads.  
Their mother called the priest and said:  
—Father, teach my boys how to read.  
The priest taught them;  
And they learned how to read and write.

One day the Khalif sent for the two boys.  
[They came.]  
He took them to his chamber;  
When he saw how big they were,  
And when he heard how they conversed,  
He became alarmed  
And sent them away. The boys went home.

The lads became seven years old.  
One day while they were playing with other boys,  
Sanasar slapped the vizier's son  
And broke his neck.  
The vizier went to the Khalif and complained:  
[17] —What a wrath of God those two brats are!  
They would not leave our children in peace.  
The Khalif replied: —What can I do?  
I know that when they grow  
They will be hanging from my beard.  
Wait, we will do something about them.

6.

The boys were growing up;  
One day, in the morning,  
While they were playing with some lads,  
The lads fell upon them and shouted:  
—You are bastards, you are bastards.  
When the twins heard what the lads called them,  
They wept, went to their mother and said:  
—Unless you tell us who our father is,  
We will go and throw ourselves into the river.  
—My sons, she said, the Khalif is your father.  
—No, they said, if he were our father,  
People would not call us bastards.  
After quieting them, Dzovinar Khanum  
Kept the boys in the palace for a while.  
A few days later, the twins went out to play again.  
Once more the lads rushed on them and shouted:  
—You are bastards, you are bastards,  
Why do you come among us?  
They went back home again, weeping,  
Fell on their mother's lap and sobbed.  
They wept so much that their mother pitied them.  
She said: —Stop crying, my boys,

Tomorrow morning I will take you on an outing  
And tell you about your father.

The next morning Dzovinar told her handmaiden:  
—Take a basket of food;  
We will take the boys to the river bank  
[18] To brighten our spirits.  
When they reached the river bank, Sanasar said:  
—Mother, tell me now who my father is;  
If you do not, I will throw myself into the river.  
—My sons, their mother said, you have no father.  
—Mother, said Sanasar,  
I did not spring out of a stone or a bush.  
I must have been sired by a man.  
His mother said: —My son, some time ago  
I went for a walk at the lake shore with my handmaiden;  
I became very thirsty and asked her  
To find some drinking water for me.  
The lake parted. Out came a spring of sweet water.  
I drank a hand cupped-full and half a hand cupped-full  
Of water from that spring.  
God granted you to me from that water.  
You are from the full hand cupped-full  
And foolhardy Baghdasar from the half a hand cupped-full.  
Sanasar then said to his mother:  
—Now we know who we are;  
Tell us who you are.  
—My sons, said Dzovinar,  
I am the daughter of the Armenian King.

They walked along the river bank till evening.  
At sundown they returned to the city  
And went back to their palace.

7.

Time passed . . .  
Sanasar and Baghdasar saw that  
Their mother was waning day by day.  
They asked: —Mother, what has happened to you?  
You are grieving, failing every day,  
And always weeping.  
You have twin sons given to you by God;  
[19] You are a lady of royalty.  
As we can see, you lack nothing.  
Now tell us, what is grieving you?  
Why are you waning day by day?  
Their mother said to them:  
—My sons, who else if not myself should grieve?  
Today or tomorrow the Khalif will have our heads cut off.  
Sanasar said:  
—Mother, could that be possible?  
We will see how he can do it.

When ten years were over  
The Khalif ordered his headsmen:  
—Go, cut their heads off.

One day, while Sanasar and Baghdasar  
Were rollicking on the divan, and while  
Their mother, in an adjoining room, was weeping,  
The headsmen, sent by the Khalif,  
Came to her and said:  
—Today we are going to cut off your head.  
Dzovinar said: —You may behead me,  
But how can you raise your hands to behead my sons?  
One of the headsmen said:  
—We would not raise our hands at your sons,  
But what are we to do?  
It is the Khalifs order; we must behead them.  
Dzovinar, weeping, pleaded: —Speak low,  
So that my sons will not hear you and be frightened.  
Let them play, have a little more joy,  
While you sit and rest.  
—No, the headsman said, we are not allowed to sit.  
You must hurry; come outside.  
If you do not, we will behead you here;  
Your blood will stain the palace room.  
[And] This time he shouted: —Hurry!  
Sanasar heard the voice;

[20] He opened the door and saw men  
With swords in hand standing in the room.  
He asked: —Who are you? What do you want?  
Their mother pleaded softly with the headsmen:  
—Do not tell my sons that  
You have come to cut off their heads.  
Let us take them outside.  
Let a headsman stand on one side  
And another on the other side,  
And strike off their heads [as they come out].  
My boys must not see the headsmen  
And become frightened.  
Behead me first; then my boys.  
The executioner said: —Let us go then.  
Sanasar asked: —Where are you going, Mother?  
—We are going out; we will be back.  
—Tell me, Mother, Sanasar insisted,  
They are taking you out for something.  
Dzovinar did not want to tell;  
Sanasar would not let her go. He said:  
—Mother, there is something you do not want to tell us.  
His mother was moved. She said:  
—My son, if you want the truth . . .  
The Khalif has sent these men to behead me.  
Sanasar asked: —Who is the headsman?  
—This man [she said].

Sanasar went to the headsman and shouted at him:  
—Are you going to behead my mother?  
The headsman said: —Yes, on the Khalif's order,  
I am going to behead you all.  
Sanasar in a rage slapped the headsman's face;  
The headsman's head flew off;  
The headless corpse remained standing.  
Seeing this, the others ran away,  
Went to the Khalif and said:  
—Your son slapped the headsman's face;  
The headsman's head flew off,  
[21] His headless corpse remained standing.

The Khalif sent soldiers to battle the twins.  
Sanasar and Baghdasar faced the soldiers,  
Battled with them,  
Killed half of them before nightfall;  
Took a rest, and returned home.  
The following day no soldier came to battle.  
The Khalif ordered his general:  
—Take your men to battle [the twins].  
The general said to the Khalif:  
—My King, we cannot overpower them.  
They are supermen, brave warriors;  
They will destroy your Kingdom.  
It will be prudent not to resume the battle  
And lose no more of our men.

The Khalif pondered and pondered.  
Realizing that he had no recourse  
And the fight on hand would destroy him, he said:  
—We have nothing more to do with the twins.  
Now I believe that  
Dzovinar Khanum is innocent, and  
These brave boys are sea-born.  
Dzovinar is my wife,  
And the boys are my sons.

8.

The Khalif [after a while] mobilized his army  
For a campaign against our [Armenian] people.  
While he was making preparations,  
Dzovinar Khanum had a dream;  
She related it in the morning:  
—Khalif, long may you live;

[22] I pray you, lend your ear to my words;  
Don't start this war,  
—Why? asked the Khalif.  
—I had a dream last night, she replied.  
—What was your dream? asked the Khalif.

Dzovinar said: —I dreamt that little stars  
Had encircled a big star;  
The little stars suddenly fell upon the big star.  
The big star flickered, came down . . .  
It came down and fell in front of our door.  
—Eh, beautiful Dzovinar, said the Khalif,  
You sleep for yourself and dream for others.  
While I am in my prime, I am going to wage war.  
—It is up to you, said Dzovinar;  
You can wage war or maintain peace; do as you wish.  
But don't you have a pact with my father?  
The Khalif replied: —I am ignoring that pact;  
I am going to war to collect my tribute.

The Khalif gathered his army,  
Completed all his preparations,  
And started on his campaign.  
He battled for seven years,  
Surrounded the city of Berd-Gaboud, and laid siege.  
The city had cattle and provisions;  
But people could not gather their harvest,  
Nor could they till their lands, nor sow seeds.  
Scarcity set in in the city—  
Scarcity so acute that it raised  
The price of one loaf of bread to one gold piece.  
Famine gripped the city.  
Many were dying of starvation.  
People, huddled in rooms, were crying:  
—Lord God, shall we ever see a day of plenty—  
A day when we shall have a belly-full of food?

There was a good man among them. He said:  
[23]—Tomorrow at this time no one will buy  
One hundred liters of bread for one silver coin.  
An unbelieving man, named Gro,  
Stood among them and said:  
—Take this handful of gold, get a loaf of bread  
So that I can take it to my children.  
Tell me, my man, where will you get it?  
If I were seeing bread with my own eyes,  
If I were eating bread with my own mouth,  
I would not believe it, I would not believe it.  
The good man cursed him:  
—Gro, I trust in my God that  
There will be bread in abundance before daybreak.  
As you have no faith in my words,  
May your eyes see [the bread],  
May your mouth not taste the bread.

King Gagik gathered his younger men  
And formed new brigades;  
At nightfall he summoned them and gave instructions:  
—Don't strike until you hear my command.  
At night, when all was still and quiet,

He suddenly shouted: —Strike!  
When the combat began, the soldiers of the pagan king  
Turned upon their comrades in the rear, and  
Those in the rear turned upon their comrades at the front.  
Kerry Toros and the younger men  
Fell upon the army of the Khalif,  
And killed, and slaughtered, and massacred.  
So dreadful was the carnage!  
Soldiers could not recognize one another.  
They killed and slaughtered each other.  
Blood ran like a stream.  
They went and asked the pagan Khalif:  
—What are you doing? Your army is being destroyed.  
The Khalif came to the scene  
And saw his soldiers killing each other.

[24] They were threatening him.  
He was left alone.  
Our people had given him a crushing defeat.  
Mounting a big Damascene camel,  
The Khalif escaped.

At daybreak people found  
The Khalif's army annihilated.  
They appointed the unbelieving man as disburser,  
To dole out to every man the captured food  
And bread in equal share.  
To one man he doled out in less measure.  
People smashed his head with the measuring vessel;  
The unbelieving man died.  
Indeed, he saw bread with his eyes, but did not taste it.

While the Khalif was in flight,  
He invoked his idols in his plight:  
—I pray thee, idols, come to my succor  
And save me from the hands of the Armenians;  
I vow to sacrifice forty heifers to you.  
But how could the idols come to his rescue?  
Again he invoked:  
—Idols, hasten to my succor;  
I pledge to offer you one hundred liters of silver  
And gifts in gold;  
I implore thee, save me from this foe.  
But the idols did not come to his aid—  
How could idols come to one's aid?  
This time he invoked:  
—I pledge to thee, O Great Idol,  
If you come, if you reach me on time  
To save me from these Armenians  
And take me to my home unharmed,  
I will sacrifice to thee Sanasar and Baghdasar.

The devas then came,  
[25] Propped the camel under the belly



And carried the Khalif to safety.

9.

Dzovinar had a dream in her sleep that night.  
She dreamt that she saw two burning lights;  
They flickered to a vanishing point,  
Then burst forth, blazed again.  
Waking up in the middle of the night,  
She asked for her boys, had them brought to her;  
One she placed on one knee  
And the other one she placed on her other knee.  
She wept; held them close  
And kissed them on their cheeks.  
—Mother, why are you weeping? the boys asked.  
Dzovinar told them about her dream:  
—In my dream, tonight, Saint Garabed [John the Baptist, "the forerunner"] revealed to me  
That the Khalif, in dire straits,  
Has pledged to sacrifice you to his idols.  
When he tries to do this,  
You should fend for yourselves.  
He will sacrifice you to his gods, my sons.  
Run away, go to the city of the Armenian king.  
Follow the bright star at night,  
And at daytime ask for directions  
To the land of the eastern king.

The boys armed themselves  
With bows and arrows, mace and sword;  
Filled a saddle bag with food,  
And went to the Khalif's stable.  
—Stable-boy, they said,  
Hurry, bring two good horses for us.  
Taking the horses, they mounted them,

[26] Came and kissed their mother's breast and said:  
-Mother, let the Khalif try  
To catch, carry, and sacrifice us to his idols.  
The two brothers invoked their God,  
Took to the road at night  
And kept riding hard till dawn.

The day was beginning to break  
When Dzovinar Khanum came out,  
Went up to the roof of the Audience Chamber  
And saw the Khalif, on a Damascene camel,  
Coming without his army, without his generals.  
He was sunburnt, black as tar.  
The pagan king, rushing, stumbling, came  
And knocked at the door.  
Lady Dzovinar greeted him:  
—Ah, long may you live, my King!

God's grace on you!  
For seven years you were boasting of successes,  
What has happened to you?  
Where is your army?  
Where are your generals?  
The Khalif replied:  
—Lady, I dealt heavy blows to the infidels  
And forced them behind the walls of their fortress;  
It was in the final hour, the time for them to surrender,  
When at dawn, suddenly, fire poured from the sky  
And massacred my soldiers and generals;  
A fiery sword fell upon my army.  
My men, crazed, slaughtered each other;  
I would have perished in the carnage, too,  
[Were it not for my presence of mind].  
I mounted a camel and escaped.  
In vain I pledged sacrifices,  
Gold and silver offerings to my idols;  
But the idols did not come to my help,  
They did not come to my rescue.

[27] At last I vowed to the Great Idol  
To sacrifice Sanasar and Baghdasar.  
He barely saved me and brought me back.

Dzovinar thought to herself at that moment: "Vallah" [Arabic: "by God"], he would take my two innocent sons  
And slaughter them."

Time went on ...  
The pagan Khalif went to the temple of idols.  
—Apologies to listeners—the evil [spirit]  
Possessed the idols;  
They demanded their sacrifice.  
A voice came from the Great Idol:  
—Fetch your two sons, Sanasar and Baghdasar,  
To my presence and sacrifice them to me;  
I will grant any wish that you have.  
The high priest came to the Khalif and said:  
—The idols ask for sacrifice.  
The Khalif said:  
—Take and sacrifice whatever you choose.  
[The high priest said:] —You have two sons  
From the daughter of the cross-worshipping king;  
The idols want them, they want nothing else.  
The Khalif said: —Within ten days  
We will take our idols to a feast at the springs;  
I will bring my two sons there  
And sacrifice them to the idols.

The Khalif came [to Dzovinar] that day and said:  
—Royal princess, do you know what is going on?  
—What is going on? asked Dzovinar.  
—Don't you know? My idols ask for sacrifice.  
Dzovinar Khanum said:

—May your household never be doomed!

[28] Don't you have any heifers, sheep, or cattle?

Slaughter them, sacrifice them.

—No, no, said the Khalif. They demand human beings.

—Ah! human beings?

Are there no waifs in your city?

Sacrifice them.

The Khalif said: —No, no. They demand your boys;

My lady, I have vowed to sacrifice your sons.

I must take your boys and sacrifice them to the idols—

The idols saved me from the enemy.

King Gagik's daughter said:

—May your house never be doomed! Why my sons?

Are they not your sons, too?

Do as you will.

Take them, sacrifice them.

But where is Sanasar? Where is Baghdasar?

We are here . . . Where are our two boys?

10.

Sanasar and Baghdasar mounted their horses,

Took to the road, and kept riding.

They rode on for four days and nights

Until they got out of the Khalif's land.

Roaming far and wide, they came to a strange land,

Entered a narrow valley,

Where they saw a big river,

And a tiny stream

That flowed from yonder mountains.

The tiny stream reached the river,

Cleft the river, mingled with it, and flowed on.

The two brothers wondered:

—How powerful that tiny stream must be!

It cleaves the big river

And reaches the opposite bank.

[29] Sanasar pondered and said to Baghdasar:

—I am amazed, really amazed!

That tiny stream, coming down

From yonder mountains,

Hits, cleaves the river,

Mingles with it and flows on.

What kind of a water is it, Baghdasar?

Baghdasar said to Sanasar:

—That water is *aznantzordy* [People belonging to a race of brave warriors of noble birth] water.

The man who drinks it at its source

Will become invincible;

No one will be able to down him.

Sanasar then said to Baghdasar:  
—Whoever finds the source of that tiny stream  
And builds his home at its site,  
He will sire sons  
As powerful as the water of that stream;  
The fountain of that stream will nurture the *aznantzordy*  
Whose offspring will be mighty and brave.  
Sanasar then took a vow:  
—By the Bread and Wine and the Eternal Lord,  
We will get to the source of that stream,  
Build our home there  
And establish our community.  
We are mighty; that stream is mighty.  
Anyone who drinks its water  
Will become a man like Azrayel.  
—As you will, brother, said Baghdasar.

They crossed the big river, reached the other bank,  
Found the stream  
And started to trace its source.  
The two brothers started their climb.  
For days and nights without a halt  
They climbed mountain after mountain,

[30] Summit after summit,  
Until they reached a highland—  
Rockbound—ravines, abysses, huge rocks, and crags,  
Forests, beasts, and bears.  
There was no habitation in those highlands.  
Enchanted with the setting of the land,  
The twin brothers searched and found the spring.  
It was a rill that ran down [the mountains],  
Reached the big river below and cleft it.  
They found the water sweet and the site delightful.  
Sanasar said: —This is a beautiful place.  
We will do well to stay here and build our abode.  
They settled at the source of the spring  
And planned to build a fortress there.  
The big brother said to his younger brother:  
—Go, shoot game for our food,  
While I gather, pile up stones  
And set markings for our abode.  
For seven days Baghdasar went every day  
And till noon shot wild birds, and brought them in.  
Sanasar gathered stones and set markings.  
Together they laid the foundation of their fortress.  
Sanasar went eastward,  
Baghdasar went westward;  
They brought huge rocks, assembled them,  
Joined hands, invoked God [for guidance],  
And, as master-builders, erected walls.  
They were building a home of their own  
At the site of that spring.  
With his bow and arrow

Sanasar was at the chase from sunrise to sunset,  
While Baghdasar kept laboring on the fortress.

11.

They worked on the fortress for ten-twenty days.  
One day, on his return from the chase,  
[31] Sanasar found Baghdasar exhausted and asleep,  
Leaving the bleeding game uncooked,  
Scattered here and there.  
He grieved much over this,  
And said: —Brother, let us go away;  
We cannot get our sustenance in this manner.  
How long are we to stay here  
And have unsalted meat for our meal?  
If God had willed,  
He would have kept us in the Khalifs court.  
Baghdasar asked Sanasar:  
—What shall we do, then, brother?  
—Let us set out and roam the world.

The two brothers rode out, arrived in Moush,  
Went to King Moushegh,  
Bowed down, prostrated themselves seven times;  
On the eighth time, crossing their arms,  
They stood waiting.  
The king asked: —Are you in want?  
Are you in need of anything, my boys?  
The boys replied:  
—We are not in want.  
Above this earth we trust in God,  
And on this earth we trust in you, O King,  
To sustain and protect us  
And safeguard us with your watchful eyes [so that]  
With God's grace, no one may be ashamed of the other.  
—Whose sons are you, my boys, asked the king?  
—The sons of the Khalif of Baghdad.  
—If you are his sons, we will not dare  
To have you with us, my boys, said the king.  
He is a powerful ruler,  
He will attack, plunder, and enslave us.  
Go back. We cannot have you with us.  
They left and went away.

[32] —Where shall we go? they asked each other,  
And started for the Amir of Arzroum.  
The two brothers went to the prince,  
Bowed to him, and stood before him.  
They were two desirable, stalwart,  
And powerful young men—these two brothers.  
As he saw them, the Amir of Arzroum  
Approved of them; he liked them

And asked about their race and parentage:  
—Who are you?  
—We are the sons of the Khalif of Baghdad,  
Replied Sanasar.  
—Hi, hi, hi! exclaimed the Amir.  
And, shaking the collar of his mantle, he said:  
—We run away even from the Khalif's dead men.  
Now we face his men alive!  
No, we cannot keep you with us.  
Begone, anywhere . . . but begone.  
They left this city, too, and went away.

The twin brothers pondered while they were on their way.  
Sanasar said to Baghdasar: —Brother, why do we bear that man's name  
While we run away from him?  
Let us not mention that dog's name again.  
No one will have us  
As long as we bear his name.  
From now on, wherever we go, whoever asks us,  
We will say we have no one—  
No father, no mother, no home, and no country.  
People may have us then.

**(Continued on Next Page)**

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# David of Sassoun

## *Sanasar and Baghdasar*

### Part I

#### *Battle against the Khalif of Baghdad*

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(Continued from Previous Page [32])

12.

And from Arzroum  
They went to the fortress of Mantzkert.  
In that fortress there was a king named Tevatoros.  
[33] The two brothers stood at the gate of his palace.  
The gate-keepers asked them:  
—Who are you?  
—We have come to serve the king, they replied.  
The gate-keepers told the king that  
Two men had come to enter his service.  
Sanasar and Baghdasar [then] went to the king,  
Bowed their heads, prostrated themselves seven times,  
On the eighth time they crossed their hands  
And stood before him.  
When he saw the two fair and comely lads,  
The king liked them. He asked:  
—What do you need, my sons?  
Why have you come to us?  
The boys replied:  
—Above the earth we trust in God,  
And on this earth we trust in you, O King,  
To sustain and protect us  
And safeguard us with your watchful eyes, [so that]  
With the grace of God,  
No one may be ashamed of the other. The king asked them:  
—Where do you come from, my boys?  
—Nowhere we know of, they replied.  
—Have you anything,  
Have you a father and mother?  
—We really have nothing, they replied,  
We have no home, no place, no country.  
Since the day we have been born from a mother,  
We have seen no father and no mother—  
Only ourselves as two orphan lads.

The king asked them:  
Will you tell me then why you are roaming?  
—We have come to you, we want to serve you.  
Very pleased with the lads, the king ordered:  
—Take these boys to fine living quarters,  
And set beds in their room.

[34] They placed the two brothers in a single room,  
And took food to them from hour to hour.  
The king liked the twin lads;  
He appointed Sanasar his head steward,  
And Baghdasar his cup bearer.

They were kept in service for a year.  
At the end of a year the vizier said to the king:  
—Let us put the twins to a test  
To see whether they possess any talent.  
The king agreed.  
They summoned the boys to the king's presence.  
The king said to them:  
—My sons, we will hold a tournament at sunrise tomorrow.  
The boys retired to their room  
And remained there till dawn.  
They rose at early morn, put on their armour,  
Mounted their horses, and went to the arena.  
With his soldiers the king went there, too;  
He said: —Sanasar,  
Take your stand with my soldiers on one side;  
I, Baghdasar, and the vizier will take our stand  
On the opposite side.  
Sanasar said: —No, my King.  
—How would you have it then, asked the king?  
—Let me and my brother stand together on one side;  
You, your soldiers, and the vizier on the opposite side.  
—As you wish, said the king.  
The tilt began; they assaulted each other . . .  
When the king looked around,  
He saw none of his soldiers. They all had been downed.  
—Doom to your household, vizier,  
You have doomed my house, said the king,  
To this day these two young men thought  
That we had virile males amongst us;  
They just proved that they are men, we are women.  
The vizier said: —If that is what you believe,  
[35] Put them out of your city. Let them go.

On the same day brigands drove the city's cattle away.  
The king ordered thirty horsemen  
To join the twin brothers in the pursuit of the bandits.  
Sanasar said: — O, King,  
We do not need those thirty horsemen,  
We two alone will chase them.  
Sanasar and Baghdasar took their arms and rode on.  
They overtook the brigands,



Shot them, slaughtered them;  
The surviving brigands they rounded up with the cattle  
And herded them back to the city.  
The king shackled, imprisoned the thieves,  
And provided generously for Sanasar and Baghdasar.

In the morning the twin brothers took a stroll.  
They saw a group of young men playing a shield-game—  
Holding shields, they were hitting each other with sticks.  
They said: —Let us get into the game.  
While playing, everyone that the twins touched  
Fainted, fell to the ground.

People went to the king and complained:  
—Come and see what the twins have done.  
The king summoned the two boys and asked:  
—What is this you have been doing, boys?  
The boys replied: —Long may the King live,  
All this happened in the game.  
The king said to them:  
—You are powerful, *aznavour* ["noble", "giant"] men,  
How could they cope with you?  
Never get into such a game again.  
The boys promised: —We will never do it again.

[36] It was a large city. There was a wedding.  
After the wedding the young men left to engage  
In cudgel-play on horseback.  
The king said to Baghdasar:  
—Join the games, have some fun.  
As they entered the arena, the horsemen halted.  
The twin brothers took position on one side,  
The horsemen faced them on the opposite side.  
Both sides engaged each other.  
At his turn, the elder brother [Sanasar]  
Was wielding the cudgel [lightly] without hitting hard,  
While the younger brother [Baghdasar]  
Was hitting hard and breaking limbs.  
Two or three young men suffered injuries.  
This seemed unfair to Sanasar;  
The twin brothers withdrew from the game  
And returned home.

Sanasar set a tray, full of fruit, on Baghdasar's head;  
Together they went to the king's divan.  
The parents of the [injured] young men were at the Court,  
Complaining to the king and saying:  
—O King, send those young men away; they are powerful.  
If you do not, they will hurt you.  
But when the parents saw the fruit  
That Sanasar brought in,  
They thought no more of their sons,  
They fell upon the tray and ate up the fruit.

One of their playmates told them:  
 —The king is angry at you;  
 He is going to put you out of this town.  
 Sanasar said to Baghdasar:

[37] —Brother, we have no permanent place here,  
 Let us go and build our own home.  
 We labored so hard,  
 The wretched building still remains unfinished.  
 Baghdasar replied: As you wish, brother. Let us go.  
 Don't serve the king his food in the morning,  
 And I will not give him his wine.  
 We will not appear before him.

When the king awoke from his sleep,  
 He did not see the brothers.  
 He summoned them.  
 The boys came to him and asked:  
 —O King, what is our fault?  
 Why do you want to put us out of your city?  
 The king said: —Sons, the word is already out of my lips;  
 I am going to send you away.  
 Retire to your room now,  
 Think over and let me know which part of my land  
 You would like to have. I will grant it to you.  
 You can go and settle there.  
 The boys pondered and decided:  
 —Let us return to the place where  
 We have set marking stones [for our home].  
 We will go and settle there.  
 They stayed in their room through the night.  
 Early in the morning they went to the king  
 And stood before him.  
 The king asked: —Where do you wish to settle, sons?  
 They replied: —Long may the King live,  
 It is true, we have no father, no mother,  
 But how can we conceal it from God,  
 Even if we conceal it from you?  
 We have labored on a wretched building  
 That we have left unfinished and come here.  
 And they said to him:

[38] —We have laid the foundation of our home  
 At a place near a spring.  
 We beg you now to give us leave  
 To go back, build our home, and settle there.  
 King Tevatoros said to them:  
 —I asked you at the beginning  
 If you had a father and mother;  
 And you told me that you have nothing, no home, no place.  
 Now that you have a place of your own,

You may go. May you fare well, a thousand times well;  
Go, build your home and fortress.

Sanasar and Baghdasar then said:  
—Long may you live, O King,  
One more favor we would ask for.  
We could not settle there alone;  
We beg you to send a few poor  
And a few rich families with us  
And build their homes near ours,  
So that we may get together at night and chat.  
The king took pity on them  
And chose forty families to go with them—  
Ah, what families!  
And to each family he gave one donkey  
And one spinning wheel.

In the morning he sent his vizier to the city  
To have the forty families move out with the twins.  
He gave them fifty sacks of flour  
And other provisions.  
The people packed their belongings;  
The twin brothers bade farewell to the king  
And departed with their caravan.  
Riding over the mountains,  
They reached the spring  
And the foundations of their fortress.  
Here Sanasar asked Baghdasar:

[39] —Shall we build our fortress  
Or the homes of these poor people first?  
Baghdasar replied:  
Let us build their homes first, then our fortress.  
Those poor people cannot be exposed to the sun.  
And they started to build.

Sanasar was so strong that  
He dug foundations of ten houses in a day,  
While the other brother brought the logs;  
They labored together,  
And, within four days, the twin brothers  
Erected the walls of forty houses.  
They cut down big logs from the mountains,  
Lugged them and, without trimming,  
Placed them on the roofs,  
Covered the rooftops, finished the houses,  
And placed the settlers in their homes.

While the boys were building the houses,  
They were taking their meals  
In a different settler's home each day,  
Eating up the provisions of that family.

The twin brothers started building their fortress  
Soon after the settlers had occupied their houses.

Sanasar carried huge rocks on his shoulders  
To the site of the fortress;  
His brother, too, carried big stones  
To the site of the fortress.  
Then they went to the [neighboring] city  
And hired a master-builder and laborers.  
Seeing the huge rocks, the master-builder said:  
—I cannot handle these rocks.  
Sanasar went to the city again

[40] And hired another master-builder.  
Seeing the huge rocks, the master-builder asked:  
—Sanasar, how are we going to set these rocks?  
I cannot handle them.  
—Who can handle them then? asked Sanasar.  
—No one can, replied the master-builder.  
—How are we going to set them then?  
—That I do not know, replied the master.  
Sanasar then said to him:  
—Master, you hang the plumb line, mark the places,  
And I will set the stones.  
In this way they built their fortress—  
Lugging mammoth rocks,  
And working with the masters.  
Sanasar and Baghdasar were so strong that,  
Single-handed, they put stone pillars on pillars  
And set thrusts.  
In this manner they worked for a whole year.  
At the end of a year  
Their house and fortress came to completion.  
Then they built a little church.  
All that remained was a name for the fortress  
And the house.  
But they did not have a name.

14.

Sanasar then said to Baghdasar:  
—We did well. We finished our house,  
Now we need a name for it. What shall it be?  
Baghdasar replied: —Brother, that is up to you.  
Building it was our task, naming it is your task.  
He stopped every passer-by and asked:  
—Give a name to our house.  
But no one could think of a name.  
Many men came to the place, but they stood  
With their lips sealed; they could not say a word,

[41] Others also came and gave a name,  
But they found the name unbecoming.  
Time went on ... Talking it over one night,  
Baghdasar said to his brother:

—You will do well. If you go  
And find a venerable old man,  
Bring him here, feast him,  
And let him name the fortress.

Early in the morning  
Sanasar arose and went here and there;  
He saw a white-bearded fatherly man  
Who, with the help of a plough-boy,  
Was furrowing the arid soil  
With six pairs of buffalos yoked to a plough.  
When the elderly man saw the giant,  
His hands began to tremble; he stopped the plough.  
Sanasar went to him, greeted him,  
Held his arm, and said:  
Babig, let me take you to our home.  
The elderly man said: —Take your hand off me.  
Sanasar said: —Don't be afraid, babig.  
Come to our home as our guest;  
I will take you there and bring you back.  
The elderly man agreed; he went with him.  
As they came near, he felt tired and said:  
—You took me far enough; I am tired.  
Sanasar said: —Yes, yes, babig, we are getting near.  
Holding his arm,  
He put him on his horse,  
Took him to the house and set him on the floor.

At home they had supper,  
And talked throughout the evening.  
Sanasar asked: —Babig, do you know  
[42] Why we have brought you here?  
The old one said: —Hi, brave stripling,  
Do you think I know? How could I know  
Why you have brought me here?  
Sanasar said: —Hi, babig,  
You are an elderly, venerable man,  
You have roamed the world.  
We just finished building this house  
We do not know what name to give to our fortress.  
Babig, I brought you here  
So that you will give a name to our stronghold.  
Give a pleasant name to our home.  
Let us see now what name you will give.  
The elderly man said: —Very well,  
Then he said:  
—I would die for you, my lads,  
What name would you like? What name shall I give?  
They said: —Venerable father,  
It is not what we like; you choose what you like.  
The elderly man said then:  
—It is dark now. In the morning we will take a stroll,  
I will look around and think of a suitable name.

They went to sleep; arose in the morning,  
Washed themselves and offered prayers.  
The elderly man ate a hearty meal,  
Went out to the courtyard, walked around and around,  
Listened to things good and bad,  
And said: —I do not see all you have built  
So that I can give a name.  
Sanasar said: —Babig, let me take you on my back  
And make the round of our fortress,  
So that you can see everything and give a name.  
Sanasar took him on his back,  
Made a round of the fortress.  
The elderly man looked around  
[43] And saw mountains on mountains.  
Sanasar took him out from the western door  
In the morning,  
Made the complete round of the stronghold  
And returned to the same door in the evening;  
There he stopped.  
People had thought among themselves:  
—Let us face the elderly man on his return,  
The first word that escapes his mouth  
Will be the name of our fortress.  
They asked: —Babig, what have you to say?  
The elderly man surveyed the massive building,  
Looked at the upper tiers,  
Saw huge rocks carried to higher levels,  
Walls built of massive boulders;  
Stunned [by this immensity], he asked:  
—Am I to give a name to all this?  
Lord bless your household,  
What name shall I give to this stronghold?  
Lord's bounty to you!  
How powerful you must be to raise these huge rocks!  
Oh, what Sassoun [enormous] rocks!  
How did you raise those Sassoun rocks  
To those upper tiers?  
How did you set those stone pillars on pillars?  
This is not a house you have built,  
This is a Sassoun stronghold you have erected.  
Oh, what a Sassoun stronghold!  
This is not a house. This is Sassoun.

Sanasar said: —That will do, babig,  
Say no more, give no other name.  
Ay, babig, the name is set,  
The name is Sassoun.  
[44] What could be better than that name?  
When you told us that we had set  
Sassoun rocks on rocks, pillars on pillars,  
You gave a name to our fortress, Sassoun, Sassoun,  
And a name to our House, the House of Sassoun.  
The fortress, thereafter, was named Sassoun,  
And the House was named the House of Sassoun.

After they had named the fortress,  
Sanasar said to the elderly man:  
—Babig, stay with us,  
I will take good care of you.  
The elderly man said: —For Lord's sake,  
Take me back to my homestead,  
To my own land. Here I have no roots.  
Sanasar took the elderly man  
Back to his homestead.

15.

What was their mode of life, their occupation?  
The twin brothers roamed the mountains during the day;  
They went as far as the lake shore,  
Hunted game, and returned home at sunset.

One day Sanasar said to Baghdasar:  
—Brother, let us go to the lake shore,  
Find a good horse and bring it home with us.  
Being fire-born, they knew that  
There were marine horses.  
They went to the lake and sat at the shore.

Sanasar said to Baghdasar:  
—Brother, let us go into the lake  
And see if we will sink.  
[45] Baghdasar replied:  
—Brother, life is sweet; I will not go into the lake.  
Sanasar said to his brother:  
—You stay here; I will go alone;  
If I do not sink, you come,  
But if I sink and drown, do not come;  
You stay here and stay alive.  
Sanasar took courage,  
Invoked God,  
And dived head-on into the lake.  
By the will of God, the lake parted  
And appeared as dry land to Sanasar,  
But seemed a sea to Baghdasar.  
Standing alone at the lake shore,  
Baghdasar wept and lamented:  
"Oh! My brother went into the lake and disappeared,  
My brother went into the lake and drowned."  
Not seeing him again,  
Overcome by anguish, he lost consciousness  
And fell on the ground.

Going into the lake,  
Sanasar walked as if he were on dry land.  
He reached a garden at the bottom of the lake,  
Where he saw a palace and pavilion,  
And a pool [in the garden].  
Water flowed in front of the palace.

There he saw the marine horse, Kourkig Jelaly, [Majestic Colt]  
Tied to a post, equipped with a saddle of mother-of-pearl,  
And a Lightning Sword hung on the side.  
There he also saw a chapel.  
As he entered the chapel, he looked around.  
He fell asleep and had a dream.  
The Mother of God appeared to him in his dream  
And said: —Arise, Sanasar,  
[46] Here stands the Battle Cross;  
Kneel down seven times and pray;  
It will be yours if you are worthy.  
You will place it on your right arm to ward off blows.  
The marine horse, Kourkig Jelaly,  
Is waiting there, saddled and bridled,  
With the heavenly Lightning Sword hanging on his side.  
You will mount him and get the Sword if you are worthy.  
Open the trunk nearby and take  
The shirt of mail,  
The girdle of armour,  
The helmet of mail,  
The shoes of mail,  
The heavy mace of the warrior,  
The strong spear, bow and arrows,  
The bugle-horn, the impregnable shield;  
You take them all. Here they are.  
You will bathe in the palace pool;  
And you will grow, gather strength and courage.  
Your strength will grow sevenfold,  
And seven will grow sevenfold;  
You will attain your heart's desire.

Sanasar awoke from his sleep and said:  
—What a strange dream!  
I wonder if it is true or false.  
He went where he had been directed,  
Opened the trunk and found everything  
He had seen in his dream.  
He saw a helmet of mail  
That would not rest on his head  
With two litres of cotton stuffed in it;  
An armour belt  
That girded his waist seven times,  
A pair of shoes of mail  
That with a litre of cotton in each  
Would still be too big for his feet.  
[47] He came out of the chapel,  
Went to the palace pool and bathed,  
Drank the water of the fountain and fell asleep.  
He slept for a short while; attained the grace of God;  
He grew, gathered strength, courage,  
And became a fiery being.  
Then he vested himself.  
He put on the shirt of mail,  
Girded the armour belt that now encircled his waist.



He put on the helmet of mail; it rested on his head.  
He put on the shoes of mail; they fitted his feet.  
He took all the vestments and arms;  
Knelt and prayed seven times,  
Girded on the Lightning Sword.  
The angels placed the Battle Cross  
On his right arm  
As a safeguard against blows.

Gathering courage, he tried to mount the horse.  
Kourkig Jelaly turned to him and asked:  
—Earth-born, what are you doing,  
What have you in mind?  
Sanasar said: —I am mounting you.  
The horse said: —I will take you to the sun to burn.  
Sanasar said: —I am sea-born,  
I will roll under your belly.  
The horse said: —I will take you down  
To the bowels of the earth, the infernal regions.  
Sanasar said: —I am sea-born,  
I will cling to your back.  
He sprang on his back, mounted the horse;  
As the horse took him to the sun to burn,  
He rolled under the horse's belly;  
As the horse took him down  
To the bowels of the earth,  
He clung to the horse's back.  
The horse then reared and pranced,  
[48] Ran here, ran there,  
Stood on his hind legs with froth in his mouth,  
But he could not throw Sanasar down.  
At last he came to his senses,  
Stood, submitted to Sanasar's will  
And said: —I am your steed, you are my master.

Sanasar drove his horse through the garden.  
A path opened in the sea;  
In an instant he reached the surface,  
Came out [of the water] to go to his brother.  
Sitting at the shore, Baghdasar was weeping;  
When he saw a mountain set on a mountain  
Coming toward him,  
He said [to himself]: —That beast will devour me,  
It drew my brother into the sea,  
Now he will draw me, take me into the sea.  
Not recognizing his brother,  
Baghdasar, frightened, ran away crying.  
Sanasar called: —Baghdasar, don't run away.  
He went to him and asked:  
—Why are you crying, lad?  
He replied: —Who should be the one to cry if not I?  
I am one of twin brothers;  
My brother went into the lake and drowned.  
Now I am left alone.

Who should be the one to cry [then], if not I?  
Sanasar asked: —Ay, lad,  
Could you recognize your brother if you saw him now?  
—How could I not recognize him? [replied Baghdasar.]  
—I am your brother, said Sanasar.  
—My brother was not as tall as you:  
He was only one measure taller than I.  
Where did he find that horse?  
Where did he find that armour?  
Sanasar held his brother, kissed him on the forehead  
And said: —Baghdasar, I am your brother,  
[49] I am Sanasar, don't be frightened, don't cry.  
Baghdasar, too, kissed Sanasar on the forehead  
And said: —Brother, while you were afloat,  
I was watching you;  
When you disappeared, I sat and lamented.  
Again they kissed each other on the forehead  
And left together for home.

16.

The twin brothers were settled in Sassoun.  
One night in his sleep Baghdasar  
Had a nightmare. What a nightmare!  
The Great Idol, in the guise of a goat,  
Came over his head and began to grunt;  
He would not let him sleep all night.  
This he kept up for a month.  
At the end of the month,  
Baghdasar became sick with jaundice and was morose.  
Sanasar asked his brother:  
—Why are you ill?  
You were in high spirits while we were laboring,  
Now you are so despondent.  
Baghdasar said:  
—Brother, you don't know that I cannot sleep at night.  
The Great Idol has not let me sleep for a month.  
In the guise of a goat, during the night,  
He hops around me and grunts over my head till daybreak,  
Allowing me no sleep.  
Brother, I am going to Baghdad;  
Either the Khalif sacrifices me to the Great Idol,  
Or I sacrifice the Khalif.  
Sanasar said:  
—God protecting you, the Khalif cannot slay you.  
Baghdasar said then:  
—Brother, it is not proper for me to go alone;  
Let us go together, slay the Khalif,  
[50] Set the temple of idols on fire,  
Throw the bad men into the flames,  
And pay a visit to our unfortunate mother  
To see how she is faring.

With a few companions they started on their journey  
And arrived at Baghdad as they had planned.  
They pitched their tents  
In a field outside Baghdad.  
Sanasar said to his brother: —Baghdasar,  
Hurry, take to mother the good news of our arrival.

People went to the Khalif, gave him the good news:  
—Light to your eyes! The boys have come back.  
The Khalif, overjoyed, said:  
Mighty is our Great Idol,  
He has brought back the sacrificial offerings  
I had pledged to him.  
Turning to his men, he said:  
—You were taunting me,  
Do you realize now the mightiness of my idols?  
He sent messengers to tell the boys:  
—The Khalif says, 'Welcome my lads,  
You knew that it was the feast day of my idols.  
I am going to sacrifice you to them.'  
The boys sent word: —We knew that your idols are mighty,  
We came to be sacrificed to them.

The following day, the two brothers  
Went to the Khalif.  
They saw him with his arms on his hips,  
Pacing the roof of the throne room.  
Seeing Sanasar and Baghdasar, he shouted at them:  
—You bastards, you curs, where have you been?  
Where did you go, why didn't you come sooner?  
Didn't you know that wherever you went  
The Great Idol would bring you back?  
[51] They replied: —We would die for you, Father;  
Ever since we were born,  
We had not seen the world.  
While we were roaming the world,  
We forgot [the pledge we had made].  
We sought refuge in the east, we could not escape;  
We sought refuge in the west, we could not escape;  
We could not escape your idols.  
Mighty, very mighty is your Great Idol,  
He would not give us rest even at night.  
The Khalif said: —Well then, let us go to the temple,  
I want to sacrifice you to the idols.  
The boys said: —Long may you live, our King,  
We are children of royal blood,  
It is not befitting for us to be taken  
And sacrificed secretly.  
We beg you to summon all the people  
To witness your sacrifice and glorify the idols.  
—Very well, said the Khalif,  
I will summon, gather all my subjects  
As you wish.

The boys returned to their tent,  
Then went to their mother.

The Khalif issued a decree, saying:  
—I am going to sacrifice  
My two sons to the idols.  
Come, glorify the idols.  
People came in droves from cities, towns, and villages.  
They came in thousands and filled the plain—  
No room remained for a dropping pin.

Through the night, Dzovinar, the boys' mother,  
Kept awake till dawn  
And shed tears over her sons.

Starting to leave, Sanasar said:  
[52] —Baghdasar, hold the horse in leash.  
I am going to the temple;  
Rush the horse to me as soon as you hear my call.  
He went to the Khalif,  
Who, delighted in seeing Sanasar, exclaimed with elation:  
—I would die for you, Great Idol!  
How you have brought back by his own will  
The sacrificial offering I had pledged to you!  
Soon you will bring back by his own will  
The other sacrificial offering, too.  
Then he asked Sanasar: —Son, where is your brother?  
Why didn't you both come sooner?  
Sanasar replied:  
—My brother is young, he is coming later.  
Take me, sacrifice me, while he is on his way.  
The Khalif said: —Bend down then so that I can slay you.  
Sanasar said:  
—Why, Khalif! Does a man offer his sacrifice  
At the altar of a sanctuary or in the open field?  
Let us go inside the temple. You sacrifice me there,  
So that your offering will be acceptable.

The Khalif said: —Vallah, you are right.  
Then taking the sword, he said:  
—Come, son, let us go,  
Prostrate yourself before the Great Idol,  
So that I can sacrifice you.  
The Khalif and Sanasar together entered the temple.  
Sanasar said to the Khalif:  
—When we left we were young  
And not aware of the mightiness of your idol.  
I have not worshipped him,  
I do not know how to prostrate myself  
In the manner pleasing to the idols.  
Will you bow and kneel down,  
And prostrate yourself before the idols first,  
So that I can see the proper way,  
[53] And do as you do.

The Khalif bowed and knelt down,  
And said: —This is the way, lad; do it this way.  
Sanasar bowed and knelt down.  
The Khalif drew his sword, ready to slay him.  
Sanasar, realizing that the Khalif  
Was really going to cut off his head,  
Invoked: —By the Bread and Wine and the Eternal Lord;  
And gave the Khalif such a kick  
That he rolled head over heels three times  
And lay on the floor.  
Sanasar grabbed the Khalif and tied him up.

The Khalif's men sent an alarm to the city,  
Gathered soldiers and came [to the temple];  
People in hordes throughout the city rushed to battle.  
Sanasar shouted: —Baghdasar, the horse!  
Taking the horse, Baghdasar dashed to his brother.  
Sanasar jumped on the horse.  
[Seeing the hordes] he exclaimed: —Ay, ay!  
If these people were cotton, and I were a flame,  
I could not burn them up;  
If these people were a blazing fire, and I were water,  
I could not put out the fire.  
The horse then spoke:  
—Sanasar, why are you frightened?  
Invoke your God,  
As many as you slay with your Lightning Sword,  
So many more I will slay with my tail;  
As many as you mow down with your Lightning Sword,  
So many more I will mow down with my breath;  
As many as you slay with your Lightning Sword,  
So many more I will trample under my hoofs.

[Mounting their horses,]  
The two brothers drew their swords  
And raced back and forth in two rounds;  
[54] The dust, raised by the hoofs of the horses,  
Clouded the sky.  
They fell upon the hordes and crushed them as ruthlessly  
As the horse crushes its oats.  
The Khalif's men fell and fell  
And lay like matting on the ground.  
The two brothers dismounted,  
Took the Khalif to their mother.  
From head to foot they tied him to a post,  
Fastened his head to a pillory,  
Lit a candle on his head,  
And sat down at his feet;  
Placed pomegranate wine on the table,  
Drank the red wine before his eyes,  
Feasted, and made merry.

Word reached their grandsire, [King Gagik],  
That Sanasar and Baghdasar have become so strong!  
They have seized the Khalif, bound him to a post,  
And, sitting at his feet, have been feasting.  
The grandsire, [hearing this,] invoked:  
—O, Lord, you could take my soul,  
If you would only let me see those boys.  
Gagik, the cross-worshipping king,  
Wrote a message, gave it to Kamy [the Wind] and said:  
—Take this message to Baghdad  
And give it to my grandson, Sanasar.  
Kamy took the message and through the keyhole  
Dropped it into Sanasar's hand.  
Sanasar read the message  
That his grandsire had written:  
—A thousand greetings to my grandson:  
The instant this message reaches your hand,  
[55] Lather your head there, shave it here.  
Sanasar said to Baghdasar:  
—I am leaving. Don't let the Khalif escape.  
Mounting his horse, he rode to his grandsire,  
Who recognized him by his resemblance to his mother.  
They feasted and talked at such length that  
Sanasar failed to think of his mother and brother.  
Baghdasar went out hunting and every day shot  
A wild sheep and brought it home.  
The household gathered, feasted on it  
And made merry.  
One day, while he was at the chase,  
The Khalif, bound hand and foot,  
Said to the maidservant:  
—Don't you see how miserable I am? Mercy on you!  
Loosen my bonds a little.  
The maidservant untied the rope and put it aside.  
The Khalif was set free. What did he do?  
He went to the city, called on everyone,  
Summoned the surviving princes,  
Held a council with them and asked:  
—What shall we do to save ourselves?  
One of the princes said:  
—Sanasar is away and Baghdasar is alone;  
Let us go and kill him.  
Another prince said: —We are not able to kill him;  
Let us have a feast, get him drunk,  
Take him and throw him in a ditch,  
Pile bush and rubbish on him, and let him perish.  
The Khalif said to his men:  
—Take seven camel loads of sour wine  
To Akhmakh Mountain [Mountain of Fools];  
[56] Tomorrow I will fool Baghdasar and take him there.  
We will give him wine,  
Get him drunk and kill him.  
The men did as they were told.

That evening,  
When foolhardy Baghdasar returned from the hunt,  
He saw the Khalif set free, but said not a word.  
The Khalif said to him:  
—Baghdasar, do you know what I am thinking?  
He asked: —What are you thinking about, Khalif?  
The Khalif said: —Let me free; I will take you to Sev Sar [Black Mountain].  
There I know of a place  
Full of wild sheep and other wild game.  
Let me free. We will go there tomorrow, hunt them down,  
Hold a great feast and camp there  
Until your brother returns.  
Baghdasar said: —Very well, we will go.  
The Khalif in this way coaxed Baghdasar to go with him.

The following day they mounted their horses and left.  
When they reached Akhmakh Mountain,  
People on all sides, holding cups of wine,  
Hailed him: —Thousand welcomes to Baghdasar,  
And offered their cups to him.  
No one drank the wine the servants brought;  
Everyone offered his wine to him.  
In this way they all beguiled him  
And filled him up with the seven-year-old sour wine.  
[The wine went to his head.]  
As they kept on offering toasts:  
—Thousand welcomes to Baghdasar,  
Baghdasar shouted:  
—Damn with your "thousand welcomes,"  
Fill up the troughs, I will drink it all up.  
[57] Baghdasar drank all the wine and became so drunk  
That he passed out, fell unconscious.  
The Khalif then said to his men:  
—Take your maces, fall upon him.  
They took their maces, started at him,  
But fearing him, hurled their maces from a distance.  
They kept throwing mace after mace  
At Baghdasar from all sides—  
So many maces that their blows  
Made a ditch forty kazes deep;  
But by God's will, none of the maces hit Baghdasar.

Sanasar [at his grandsire's] stepped out,  
Looked up to the sky  
And saw that Baghdasar's star was dimmed.  
He said to himself: —My brother is in danger.  
Turning around, he said to his grandfather:  
—Grandsire, I am leaving; my horse, quick.  
I will get either to my brother's corpse or to his bier.  
His grandsire said: —Mercy on you!  
At this moment your brother comfortably  
Is feasting with his mother.  
While he is rejoicing there,  
You can rejoice with us here.

Sanasar could wait no longer;  
He took out his horse himself,  
Mounted him, and within the wink of an eye,  
Arrived at his mother's house.  
—Mother, where is my brother, Baghdasar?  
—The Khalif took him to Akhmakh Mountain  
On an outing, outdoor feasting.  
—Alas, they have tricked my brother, said Sanasar.  
They are going to kill him.  
Hardly had he said this,  
When he dashed out, reached Baghdasar.  
[58] He found Baghdasar intoxicated with wine,  
Dead-drunk, lying unconscious,  
And people on all sides hitting him with their maces,  
And striking him with their swords,  
Trying to kill him.  
Sanasar, raving mad, invoked God and fell upon them.  
Hurling his heavy mace,  
He hit, slew the Khalif who, under the blow,  
Went down into the earth seven kazes deep.  
Then he slaughtered all the other men.

Sanasar stood over his brother,  
Poured water on his head, washed him,  
And massaged his heart to revive him.  
He called: —Baghdasar, Baghdasar.  
Regaining consciousness, Baghdasar  
Raised his head and said: —Ah, mercy on you!  
You did not let me enjoy my sound sleep.  
Sanasar said: —Mercy on you!  
Stand up now and look around.

The twin brothers returned to the city.  
Baghdasar then proclaimed to the people:  
—Whoever believes in what I believe,  
Let him come, pass beneath my sword.  
People from the cities and towns hurried,  
Came, and passed beneath his sword.

And their mother, Dzovinar Khanum,  
Bowed, knelt and prostrated herself, saying:  
—I thank Thee, Thou Creator of heaven and earth,  
For your mercy in delivering us and our people  
From the hands of that tyrant.

18.

They stayed there [in Baghdad] for a while,  
Then they took their mother and her handmaiden  
[59] And started for Armenia.  
As they approached the city of King Gagik,  
They camped beside a spring.  
Seeing a man, a passer-by,



They called him over and said to him:  
—Take good tidings to the King,  
Many greetings to him and Kerry Toros,  
And tell them, "Your Dzovinar and her twin sons  
Have arrived in good health.  
They are camping at the spring,  
Light unto your eyes!"  
King Gagik and Kerry Toros went out to meet them.  
They embraced, kissed each other, wept and rejoiced,  
Ate and drank and toasted.  
The King and Kerry Toros then said to them:  
—Let us start for the city.  
They all left together, reached the city,  
Went to the King's palace,  
And held a feast for seven days and seven nights.

Then Sanasar said to the king [Gagik]:  
—Grandsire, I have a request.  
The King asked: —What would be your request?  
Sanasar said: —We have built a home of our own,  
May we go there?  
The King replied: —Son, I have no heir.  
Upon my death, my kingdom  
Will be yours and will be your domain.  
They said: —No, our King, long may you live,  
We came, paid you a visit;  
Thank God, we found you alive and in good health.  
Our longing is satisfied. We are going to our home.  
While they were preparing to leave,  
Their mother, [Dzovinar], advised her twin sons:  
—My sons, ask the king  
To bequeath to you Dzovasar, Maratgachour,  
[60] Jabaghchour-Bazhin, and Koteh.  
If he vows on 'the Bread and Wine and the Eternal Lord/  
He will grant your request.

Sanasar then said to the king:  
—We have one more request.  
—Sons, said the king,  
Whatever you wish other than our soul,  
On the Bread and Wine and the Eternal Lord,  
We will grant it to you.  
They said: —Will you bequeath to us Dzovasar,  
Maratgachour, Jabaghchour-Bazhin, and Koteh?  
The king said:  
—Yes, my sons, we bequeath them to you.

Dzovinar and her twin sons took leave,  
Mounted their horses, and took to the road.  
Kerry Toros went with them, too.  
Sanasar headed the caravan that climbed its way  
To the stronghold of Sassoun.

Sanasar was very strong—a powerful man.  
He built boundary walls  
Around Sev Sar as far as  
Dzudzmagakit and the outskirts of Moush,  
Reaching the range of Seghan Sar [Table Mountain],  
The plain of Jabaghchour,  
And the headwaters of Mourad River [Aradzany (Arsanias), a tributary of the river Euphrates]  
He ruled over all these territories.  
Sanasar built four big gates to his stronghold,  
And kept them constantly closed.  
Mounted on his horse, Kourkig Jelaly,  
He went [to the chase]  
And hunted many wolves and beasts.  
[61] Before long he extended his domain as far as Msr,  
The bridge of Batman and the Valley of Ankugh.  
Sanasar became a great pahlevan [hero].  
His fame spread throughout the world.  
Many people, hearing of him, said [to one another]:  
—Brother, why do we stay here  
Where thieves all the time  
Rob and plunder our belongings?  
By the grace of God we will move to Sassoun,  
Where Sanasar and Baghdasar,  
Two mighty pahlevans rule;  
Where they collect no taxes and tributes;  
Where men will not plunder our possessions.  
And little by little people moved to Sassoun.  
And Sassoun grew, became a big city.

**(Continued on Next Page)**

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# David of Sassoun

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[Page 63]

## *Sanasar and Baghdasar*

### Part II

#### *The Marriages of Sanasar and Baghdasar*

1. [64] I pray for mercy  
Mercy on Khanum Dzovinar;  
I pray for mercy,  
Mercy on Sanasar, Baghdasar;  
I pray for mercy,  
Mercy on Deghtzoun Dzam [Golden Locks];  
I pray for mercy,  
Mercy on the departed [kinsmen] of the Listeners.

2. [65] What shall we tell about?  
We shall tell about Bghntze Kaghak [Copper City],  
We shall tell about the daughter of the King of Katcher [Spirits].  
The great fame of Sanasar-Baghdasar  
Spread throughout the world—  
That there are two such and such and such  
Stalwarts in Sassoun.  
Sanasar's fame and the story of his  
Brave deeds reached [also] Bghntze Kaghak;  
It reached the ears of Deghtzoun Dzam of forty-braids,  
The daughter of the King of Katcher.  
This king had two daughters;  
He had no other children.  
Deghtzoun Dzam was an enchantress, a sorceress.  
Sanasar dreamt of her one night  
And fell madly in love with her.  
Learning of this, the maiden said:  
—He is a brave warrior,  
I will send a letter to him.  
Let him come; if I approve of him, I will marry him.  
This daughter of the King of Bghntze Kaghak  
Placed an apple on the mouth of a jug filled with water,  
And another apple on the mouth of an empty jug.  
She wrote a letter to Sanasar; The letter read:  
—From Deghtzoun Dzam,  
The daughter of the King of Katcher,  
[66] Many greetings to Sanasar,  
Many greetings to Baghdasar and Sanasar:  
Sanasar lad,

I am the daughter of the King of Bghntze Kaghak.  
My heart is pure and unpossessed like this empty jug,  
My mind is full [of knowledge]  
Like this jug filled with water.  
I am blessed with heavenly graces;  
Many have come to ask for me—  
Forty men from forty lands have come to woo me—  
But to none of them am I committed.  
I have seen you in my dream. Come, marry me.  
You are pleasing to me,  
Sanasar lad,  
It is to you I am writing this letter:  
How long am I to wait for you?  
If you have lathered your head, don't shave it [there],  
Come, take me as your wife.

She enclosed her picture in the letter,  
Sent for two serving maids,  
Attached the letter [and the jugs] to their arms,  
And said: —Take these to Sassoun;  
Through the chimney  
Drop them in Sanasar's bedchamber,  
At the head of his bed,  
So that he can see them  
When he wakes up in the morning.  
If he is a man of courage,  
Let him come and take me for himself.  
Do not let me hear that you have dropped them  
Over Baghdasar through the chimney.  
These two maids were sorcerers;  
They took on the plumage of birds

[67] And transformed themselves into two white doves.  
They winged their way to Sassoun,  
Lighted on the roof of the [mansion of] House of Sassoun.  
Going to the chimney on the right, they looked down  
And saw a young man asleep on a bed laid on the floor.  
He was perspired. His face, glowing red,  
Seemed to say to the sun:  
—Step aside, let me go forth [and shine].  
Two candlesticks were burning over his head,  
Two candlesticks were burning at his feet.  
One of the messengers said:  
—Sister, let us look down  
The other chimney, too;  
The young man we saw may not be Sanasar.  
They looked down the other chimney  
And saw a young man asleep in his clothes.  
They looked at him; he was perspired, too,  
And ten times as handsome as the other one.  
One of them said: —Sister, this young man is Sanasar;  
Let us drop the letter [and jugs] down this chimney.  
The other maiden said: —By God, sister,  
That other young man is very handsome, too.

I cannot tell which one is Sanasar,  
This one or the other one.  
Unable to determine which one was Sanasar,  
They dropped the letter down the chimney on the right,  
Over foolhardy Baghdasar.

3.

In the morning Baghdasar arose,  
Put on his clothes, looked around, and saw  
A note on his bed.  
Unfolding it, he read it and learned  
That it came from the daughter of the King of Katcher.  
In the letter she had written:  
—Many greetings to Sanasar,  
[68] Many greetings to Baghdasar and Sanasar.  
He wondered: —What does this mean,  
Greetings to Sanasar twice and to me once?  
I can understand, Sanasar being the elder brother,  
She has mentioned him first;  
But why does she mention him twice?  
He read the note and learned that  
The daughter of the King of Katcher  
Had written to Sanasar:  
—Come, marry me; come, take me away.  
Baghdasar had a touch of foolhardiness.  
In resentment he said: —My brother wants a wife;  
He is getting married without my knowledge;  
He is ignoring me.  
Then he thought to himself: —By God, we are brothers,  
When did he pledge himself to her  
Without saying a word to me?  
Sanasar is doing something in secret.  
Angered, he sat on his bed  
And did not come out of the room.  
Seeing the picture in the letter,  
He completely lost his mind,  
Blood gushed out of his nostrils.  
He said: —It is my brother's life or mine.  
He folded the letter, put it in his chest pocket.  
His heart was smitten with pain;  
He would not talk to Sanasar  
And would not answer his questions.

When they arose in the morning  
And sat at the spread for breakfast,  
They did not find the lad Baghdasar there.  
Sulking, he had stayed in his room and had not come out.  
—Ah, he said, what an ingrate my brother is;  
[69] He does things without me.  
If this is so, I will not join them at the spread,  
Nor will I eat their bread.  
I will mount my horse,

Go to other lands, get out of sight,  
And see what God has in store for me.

His mother asked: —What is wrong,  
Why didn't Baghdasar come [to breakfast]?  
She arose, went to the room,  
Opened the door and asked:  
—Baghdasar, why didn't you come to breakfast,  
What has happened, are you ill?  
Baghdasar replied:  
—Mother, if another person  
Opened that door and walked in,  
I would have cut that person to pieces.  
—Why, what has happened to you? she asked.  
He took the letter out, handed it to her and said:  
—Mother, take this letter, read it  
And see why I did not come to breakfast.  
How could I join you at the spread [when]  
My brother is taking a wife without my knowledge?  
Why? Do I not mean anything to him?  
He could have told me, and then got married.  
Go, tell Sanasar, it will be his life or mine.  
Dzovinar took the letter, read it, and said:  
—Son, I know nothing about this,  
I am disturbed more than you are.  
She took the note, came to Sanasar, gave it to him,  
And said: —Take your letter.  
Sanasar took it and read it:

—From Deghtzoun Dzam,  
The daughter of the King of Katcher,  
Many greetings to Sanasar,  
Many greetings to Sanasar and Baghdasar:  
[70] Sanasar lad,  
I am the daughter of the King of Bghntzeh Kaghak,  
My heart is pure and unpossessed like this empty jug,  
My mind is full [of knowledge]  
Like this jug filled with water.  
I am blessed with heavenly graces;  
Many have come to ask for me—  
Forty men from forty lands have come to woo me—  
But to none of them am I committed.  
I have seen you in my dream. Come, marry me.  
You are pleasing to me,  
Sanasar lad,  
It is to you I am writing this letter:  
How long am I to wait for you?  
If you have lathered your head, don't shave it [there],  
Come, take me as your wife.  
Sanasar read the letter, then said:  
—Mother, I swear before your God  
That I know nothing about this.  
The mother said: —Your brother is angry with you.  
Sanasar said: —What can I do?

That maiden is a sorceress, an enchantress,  
She has heard of us and written this letter.  
What can I do if my brother is angered?  
He is a bit foolhardy.  
Go, tell him this gently;  
If his anger subsides, well,  
If not, let him come and give me one or two blows  
To slake his anger, calm himself down.  
The mother went, pleaded gently with Baghdasar,  
But Baghdasar's anger did not subside.

When Sanasar returned home that evening,  
He greeted his brother,  
But Baghdasar did not return his greeting.  
He asked: —Brother, why are you angry?  
Baghdasar replied:  
[71] —It is you or I; one of us shall die.  
—Why, what is the reason? asked Sanasar.  
—Why should the daughter of the King of Katcher  
Greet you twice in her letter and greet me once?  
Sanasar said: —What could I do?  
It is she who has written [the letter].  
—No, you and I will fight this out [said Baghdasar].  
—Why should we fight over a trifle greeting?  
Baghdasar said: —You are doing something in secret,  
You have sent a note to that maiden  
And have not said a word to me.  
Sanasar said: —Brother, God be my witness,  
I have not written a note to her.  
Baghdasar persisted:  
—No, you and I shall fight this out.  
Sanasar said: —Brother, I will not hit you,  
You may hit me, you may kill me.  
In vain Sanasar pleaded with his brother,  
For Baghdasar was stubborn,  
Had a touch of foolhardiness,  
He was called Foolhardy Baghdasar.

4. Sanasar thought to himself later on:  
—Let me take my brother to the fields and meadows,  
Wrestle with him and race the horses.  
He may relent then.  
He took his brother out.  
When they reached a field, among the meadows,  
They dismounted, grabbed each other, and wrestled;  
They held one another's neck,  
And trampled each other till noon.  
Dzovinar wondered:  
—What happened? They did not return.  
As she went out,  
She heard their voices resounding among the rocks.

[72] The earth was rumbling under their feet.  
She went out and saw their plight.

She beat her knees; her legs tottered,  
She sat and watched.  
Neither one subdued the other.  
Neither one downed the other.  
While Sanasar was feigning,  
Baghdasar was striking in earnest.

Dzovinar saw that Baghdasar weakened,  
His strength failed; he gave way.  
Seeing this, she lamented:  
[Chanting:]  
—O mountains, rocks, and trees,  
Take my plea to the uncle  
To come to his pahlevans.

She watched for another hour;  
Seeing that Baghdasar was about to fall,  
She lamented:  
[Chanting:]  
—O seas, O breakers,  
Take my plea to the uncle  
To come to his nephews.

They showered blows at each other till evening;  
Neither one downed the other.  
In the evening they halted their fight, started for home.  
On their way, Baghdasar said to his brother:  
—We will come and fight tomorrow, too.  
They reached home, slept till morning.

In the morning, they arose, had their breakfast,  
Took out their horses,  
Took their maces,  
Put on their shields,  
[73] Sallied forth on their steeds to resume their fight.  
Their mother also went along with them.  
Sitting helplessly to one side, she wept  
And cursed the maiden sorceress:

—May she never fare well for causing this [heartache].  
Since early morn my two sons  
Have been at each other's throat,  
Hitting, tearing each other.

The twin brothers, maces in hand, raced their horses,  
And hurled maces at each other.  
Sanasar stood on top of a rock [as the target],  
Baghdasar hurled his mace,  
Hurled it in earnest to kill Sanasar,  
But the mace passed over his head.  
Sanasar caught the mace,  
Hurled it back, [but] not far enough to hit his brother.  
Baghdasar took the mace, hurled it again;  
Sanasar caught it once more, hurled it back again.  
Sanasar, naive and pure at heart,



Did not aim in earnest at Baghdasar.  
He did not wish to hurt his brother,  
He was only holding his shield  
To protect himself against his brother's blows.  
Baghdasar was hitting Sanasar  
With all his strength;  
He aimed to unseat him from his horse  
And then and there kill him with one blow,  
While Sanasar was aiming his mace over Baghdasar's head.  
Sanasar thought to himself:  
—He may stop.  
But Baghdasar did not stop, he kept on striking.  
Sanasar then thought to himself: —He will not stop.  
And they battled, till noon,  
And from noon till evening.  
Sanasar then said to himself:  
[74] —His anger has not subsided yet.  
Heavens! I believe he is hitting me in earnest.  
Let me see if my brother has the strength that I possess.  
While he is aiming to kill me,  
I am dodging his blows lest they hit me;  
Let me aim at him, strike him a blow,  
And see if he can dodge it, resist or withstand it.

Sanasar gently hit Baghdasar  
With a light blow [of his mace].  
Baghdasar held up his shield,  
But could not dodge the blow  
That hit him and unseated him from his horse.  
Sanasar cried aloud:  
—Ah, what did I do? I did not realize  
My strength and the force of my blow;  
I hit and killed my brother.  
He dismounted his horse,  
Went to his brother's side  
While his mother came to the other side.  
Together they wept, fell over him,  
But found him still alive.  
The mace had hit his foot.  
Stunned [from the blow], he had fallen down.

Sanasar put his brother on his back, carried him home,  
Massaged his heart, rubbed his navel;  
He saw the maiden's picture in his pocket.  
Sitting beside him, he wept all night.  
At daybreak Baghdasar regained consciousness.  
When he sat up, Sanasar asked him:  
—Brother, what happened to you?  
He said: —I felt pain in my foot and lost consciousness.

Sanasar then asked:  
—Brother, is it because of this picture and this letter  
That you are angry with me, not speaking to me?

[75] I would die for you,  
She is nothing to me. Go, fetch her for yourself.  
Baghdasar said to Sanasar:  
—Brother, I did not know that  
You were stronger than I.  
Let us make peace; you are braver than I.  
Never again shall I raise my hand against you.  
I am your young brother, you are my elder brother;  
I will always listen to whatever you say,  
You have my consent;  
Go for the maiden, fetch her for yourself.  
Sanasar said: —No, I don't want to go;  
You go, bring her for yourself.  
Baghdasar said: —Linger no more,  
Get ready, mount your horse,  
Invoke God, and start.  
Sanasar said again: —I don't want to go and fetch her,  
She is a sorceress, an enchantress.  
Baghdasar said: —I am insisting, go and fetch her.  
She has learned that we are great men,  
She has heard of our fame and has sent a letter to us.  
If you fail to go and fetch that maiden,  
We will be belittled in people's esteem.  
They will say that the twins did not dare  
To go and fetch a maiden on their own.  
It is unthinkable for you not to go.  
Start now, go and fetch that maiden.

5. Sanasar went to his mother, Dzovinar Khanum,  
And said: —Mother, pack up my things,  
I am going to the land of Katcher.  
That note was meant for me.  
His mother said: —Don't go, my son,  
[76] We barely escaped from Baghdad.  
The son said: —No, I am going Even if I forfeit my head.

Dzovinar had everything packed, ready [for him].  
Before leaving,  
Sanasar kissed his mother's hand, bade her farewell,  
Mounted his horse,  
Started on his way, stopped and called:  
—Baghdasar, I would die for you,  
Come out, let me see you;  
Brother, you stay at home  
While I am gone after that maiden.  
I will return within three days.  
If I do not return, you will know that I am in distress;  
You will then come to my assistance.  
They begged each other's pardon,  
Forgave one another, exchanged their rings;  
Sanasar then bade farewell and departed.

The distance of forty days he covered within one day,  
And came to a crossroad. There he saw

A venerable old man sitting by the wayside.  
—Greetings to you, fatherly sire, said Sanasar.  
—Lord's bounty to you, Sanasar, said the elderly man,  
Will you dismount, I have something to tell you.  
—Babig, who are you to know that I am Sanasar?  
He replied: —I am the angel of God;  
Sitting here, I point the way to wayfarers.  
Where are you going, Sanasar?  
—I am going to the Land of Katcher, said Sanasar,  
Show me the way—a good road.  
The elderly man said:  
—If you take this road, you will become a king;  
If you take the other road, you will become a merchant;  
But if you go to the Land of Katcher,  
You will suffer much harm there.

[77] Sanasar said: —I am going to that land of Katcher  
Even if I know that  
My head will be chopped off with three strokes.  
If you can advise me on other things, tell me.  
The elderly man said: —Son, when you travel,  
Whatever you meet,  
Rock, bush, animal or beast,  
Offer them all your greetings.  
Don't pass them by without a greeting.  
If you pass them by without a greeting,  
That Land of Katcher, being a land under magic spell,  
Will inflict much harm upon you.  
Sanasar said: —Farewell!  
He mounted his horse  
And rode away to the land of Katcher.

He kept on riding, how far, God only knows,  
Until he reached the land of the King of Katcher.  
He saw a shepherd tending a flock of sheep;  
Believe it! He was truly the king's shepherd,  
One of his pahlevans.  
He asked Sanasar:  
—Where are you going, brave stripling?  
—To the city of the King of Katcher, replied Sanasar.  
—Dismount, rest a little, said the shepherd,  
I will give you some milk; drink it, then ride on.  
—No, I am in a hurry, I must go, said Sanasar.  
The shepherd said: —No one can pass by this road  
Unless he drinks some milk.  
He forced Sanasar to sit.  
The shepherd had a big trough  
In which four men could swim.  
He filled that trough with milk  
And put it before Sanasar with some bread.  
What was in the shepherd's mind?  
He wanted to put people to a test  
To learn how strong they were.  
[78] By making the passers-by drink the milk,

He would know how strong they were.  
Whoever would travel on that road,  
The shepherd would put him to the same test,  
Then he would let him go to Deghtzoun Dzam.  
The pahlevans would kill him there.

The shepherd filled the trough,  
Placed it before Sanasar to drink,  
And went to make his round of the sheep.  
Hardly had he made a round, when Sanasar shouted:  
—Shepherd, come take away your trough;  
I thank you; fare you well; I am on my way.  
The shepherd returned. When he saw that  
Sanasar had drunk the milk, overturned the trough,  
He shuddered and said:  
—Sanasar, I bid you well, have no fear.  
Wherever you go, no one will be able to harm you.

Sanasar rode on, reached Bghntzeh Kaghak.  
He looked around; what did he see?  
Beneath the city wall he saw forty men  
Standing still; standing so long  
That their beards had grown and turned yellow.  
Sanasar said: —Greetings to you, elderly sires,  
White-bearded, red-bearded,  
And brown-bearded pahlevans.  
The men said: —Lord's bounty to you, young man;  
By noon tomorrow you will be reduced to our condition.  
One of the elders added:  
—Alas, alas! Brave stripling,  
You, too, fell into the hands of this infidel?  
Sanasar asked: —What did you say, Appo jan [my dear brother]  
Why shall I be reduced to your condition?  
[79] He replied: —We, too, were bold and brave like you  
When we came for that maiden;  
Before we knew, we were reduced to this condition.  
Sanasar asked:  
—Tell me, brothers, what happened to you?  
How were you reduced to that condition?  
They replied:  
—She casts a magic spell, she is a sorceress.  
Wait a little while;  
That infidel has a strange bird;  
When it comes, alights on the wall and screeches,  
You will be transformed into a man of our image.

Sanasar was prudent. He did not enter the city.  
Turning his horse, he rode away a short distance,  
And waited till nightfall.

6.

Darkness fell. He turned back, came close to the city;  
Drawing the reins of Kourkig Jelaly,  
He picked a clearing [space] for a dash,

Invoked God; spurred his horse,  
And all at once flew over the copper wall,  
Entered the city and dismounted—  
The city had no open gates. He had to hurdle the walls.  
He strolled in the city for a long while,  
But could not find a lodging place he would like.  
He came to the edge of the city where he found an inn  
Owned by an Armenian. There he lodged.

The innkeeper was a white-bearded, elderly man.  
—What is the daily rate of this inn, Appo jan? asked Sanasar.  
—Son, replied the innkeeper,  
One piece of silver for the horse,  
Half a piece of silver for the man.  
—Appo, I will give you two pieces of silver for my horse  
And three pieces of silver for myself—  
[80] He valued himself higher than the horse—  
You will take good care of my horse.  
Leaving the horse [tied] in the stall,  
He went for a stroll in the city,  
Bought a loaf of bread from [an open] brick oven,  
Returned to the inn  
And sat beside the elderly innkeeper.

Night had fallen. He ate his meal, then he said:  
—Halvor [term of respect], tell me a story. I would like to hear one.  
The elderly man said: —I don't know any tale.  
—Appo jan, I would ask you a question.  
—What is your question, son?  
Sanasar said: —What is the name of this city?  
The old innkeeper said: —Son,  
The name of this city is Bghntzeh Kaghak.  
—Then, this is Bghntzeh Kaghak?  
—Yes, this is Bghntzeh Kaghak.  
Sanasar asked then:  
—The king of this city has a daughter;  
What kind of a maiden is she?  
The elderly man replied:  
—Why should that concern you, son?  
She is what she is.  
—I was wondering, babig.  
The elderly innkeeper said: —Son,  
The daughter of our King is a sorceress  
Casting magic spells.  
Many, many sons of royalty came to marry her.  
She cast magic spells over them, then cast them aside,  
One here, one there,  
It could not be that you have come to marry her!  
If you have come with that intent,  
You are a boy to be pitied.  
Turn back! Go back, spare yourself!  
[81] Keep your hands off such ventures,  
Many have come, and all have failed.  
Sanasar said: —No, babig, I have not come for her.

What have I to do with her?  
But her magic spell should not remain unbroken!  
Babig, Lord's mercy on your father, tell me exactly  
What is the secret of her magic spell?  
He replied: —Her spell lies in the sea.  
There is a precious gem  
In the mouth of a dragon in the sea.  
Only a fiery-man could plunge into the sea,  
Snatch the gem from the dragon's mouth,  
[Break the spell]  
Then rise in the morning  
And see the maiden nude in her chamber.  
That will break her magic spell;  
No magic spell will ever take effect on him,  
He can capture the maiden and marry her.

Sanasar then said: —Babig, I want to see her pavilion;  
Please show it to me.  
—Why are you concerned with these things?  
—Appo jan, begged Sanasar,  
I have come from a strange land; for Lord's sake,  
Please show it to me, so that I can see it,  
And on my return to our land  
Tell what I have seen of this city.  
The elder man took Sanasar  
To the roof and pointed it to him:  
—Do you see those mansions and windows in black?  
That is where the pavilion of the king's daughter is.  
Black curtains cover the windows,  
So that the maiden will not see the world outside.  
Sanasar asked:  
—Babig, what is that object burning like fire?  
—Son, that is a golden apple,  
Placed on the rooftop of her palace.  
[82] There is also a mace on top of that tower.  
Whoever brings down that golden apple,  
Puts it in his chest pocket,  
And, mounted on his horse,  
Flies high and puts it back in its place;  
Whoever has the might to snatch the mace  
From the top of the tower;  
The precious gem from the mouth of the dragon;  
Whoever challenges and fights the king like a warrior;  
He will carry away the maiden.  
Sanasar said then: —Oh Appo, who am I  
To go into such ventures?  
It was only a question I asked you.  
When I go to other lands, [I will tell people]  
Bghntzeh Kaghak is such and such a city.  
Come, let us go down, I am sleepy.  
They went down to the inn,  
Spread their beds and went to sleep.

The older man fell asleep. Sanasar did not.  
He thought to himself: —By the Cross! If all I heard is true,  
I will start my venture tonight.  
Seeing that the old one had fallen asleep,  
He waited awhile until fewer people were on the streets;  
He got up, turned to the east,  
Knelt down three times before God,  
Then went out, mounted his horse, and left the inn.  
It was a moonlit night, bright as day.  
Sanasar invoked God,  
Called on the Battle Cross.  
He paced the square back and forth, warmed up the horse,  
Dug the spurs into his sides, excited him,  
And with one leap reached the pinnacle,  
Snatched the golden apple, put it in his chest pocket;  
At top speed he rode the distance of one hour,  
Turned, rode back to the square.  
Once more with one leap he reached the top of the tower,

[83] He invoked God, called on the Battle Cross,  
Grabbed the mace, twisted it, pulled it out, and hurled it.  
The mace flew a distance of half an hour, hit the ground  
And sank into the parched earth one kaz deep.  
Then he rode the horse into the sea, reached the bottom,  
Saw the dragon raising its head.  
He descended on it  
And with his mace dealt a blow to the dragon's head.  
The dragon shook itself,  
The gem flew out of its mouth, landed in the field.  
The dragon shook itself [again]. The sea rose, and,  
Like pouring rain, flooded the city.  
A hurricane ["dragon wind"] turned the city  
Into a raging dragon-sea.  
Sanasar returned to the inn,  
Crouched [in a corner] and slept till dawn.

At daybreak, in early morn, people saw  
The windows of Deghtzoun Dzam's palace wide open;  
The light from the palace had flooded the city.  
Awaking from his sleep at dawn  
Sanasar went to the roof and looked around.  
A maiden could be seen  
Through the windows of the palace;  
He saw the maiden in her chamber.  
The magic spell was broken.  
Turning to the old one, Sanasar said:  
—Babig, a dragon-wind from Sassoun  
Blew during the night,  
And brought a dark cloud  
That poured rain and drenched the city.

The king summoned his town crier and said:  
—I want the man who has snatched the gem  
[84] From the mouth of the dragon.  
Search the town. I want the man who has come  
And carried away the golden apple of my daughter.  
Seize him, bring him to me; I will have him beheaded.  
The town criers searched the town  
For two hours, but found no one.  
They went to the old man's inn and asked:  
—Halvor, have you any strangers in the inn?  
The innkeeper said: —No, no one came  
To the inn, except that boy  
Who came a little while ago. He is sleeping now.  
Thinking nothing of the young man,  
The innkeeper said: —I have no stranger here.  
The young man stood up and said: —Brother,  
Why do you say you have no stranger? I am a stranger.  
The elderly man was annoyed: —Keep quiet,  
They will seize you and kill you, he said.

—Why should they kill me? said Sanasar.  
He called after the town criers:  
—Brothers, I am a stranger, what do you want to ask?  
The town criers saw that  
He was youthful and naive;  
Their hearts went out to him.  
They said: —Ey, lad, let us hide you,  
We pity you. Don't appear before our king.  
Sanasar asked: —What is wrong about the king?  
Why shouldn't I appear before him?  
They replied: —Son,  
Last night someone snatched and carried away  
The golden apple belonging to the king's daughter.  
The king has ordered that  
The man on whom the golden apple is found  
[Should be given a chance to fight].  
If he can win, his life will be spared;  
If he cannot win, his head will be chopped off.

[85] Sanasar took the golden apple  
Out of his chest pocket, showed it to them and said:  
—Town criers, go tell the king that you have seen  
The man who snatched the golden apple.

They went to the king and said to him:  
—We have seen the man who snatched your golden apple.  
The king ordered: —Go, tell him to appear before me,  
He is a prisoner of the king.  
They came and said to Sanasar:  
—You are a prisoner of the king.  
Come with us and surrender to the king.  
Sanasar said: —King, which king?  
Yes, oh, yes, I want to battle with your king.  
God will be either on my side or on his side.



Why should I surrender to the king?  
I am looking for a fight—so that I can fight . . .  
Hearing this, the king said:  
—Very well, whoever did this, he did it for my daughter.  
Let him come forth and tell me how he did it;  
I will grant my daughter to him.

Sanasar came forth and said: —I am the one.  
The king asked: —Did you do this?  
He replied: —Yes, I did.  
The king said: —If you really did this,  
If you snatched the golden apple off the pinnacle,  
Put it back again.  
If you do that, I will grant my daughter to you;  
If you do not, I will behead you.

Sanasar mounted his horse, came to the square,  
Paced back and forth, excited the horse,  
With one leap reached the pinnacle,  
And placed the golden apple on its peak.  
In full speed he dashed away for one hour,  
Then he turned back, came to the king,  
[86] Who said to him: That is done!  
But it was your horse that did it, not you.  
And he added: —As you snatched that mace off  
The top of the tower and hurled it down,  
I want you to take it up again  
And put it back in its place.  
If you do it, I will grant my daughter to you;  
If you do not, I will have you beheaded.

Sanasar went out [to the field], dug up the mace,  
Whirled it around and flung it back  
To its place atop the tower.  
Through the force of the blow the tower collapsed.  
The king said: —I see that  
You are a brave and powerful lad.  
You have met three tests, added the king,  
I have sixty pahlevans, imprisoned in chains;  
I will release them to fight you;  
If you down them all,  
You will have my daughter.  
Sanasar thought to himself: —I have set three days  
For my stay in this city;  
Is the king going to have me fight  
These pahlevans one by one, or all together?  
He asked: —O King,  
Are you setting your pahlevans against me  
One by one, or all together?  
The king replied: —Sanasar,  
If I set them against you all at once,  
They will shred you to pieces.  
Let me set them against you one by one.  
If you overpower them, you will have my daughter;

If you do not, you will be slain by them.  
—Long may you live, O King, he replied,  
I will not stay here to fight for sixty days.  
Release the sixty altogether;

**(Continued on Next Page)**

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# David of Sassoun

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## *Sanasar and Baghdasar*

### Part II

#### *The Marriages of Sanasar and Baghdasar*

(Continued from Previous Page)

[87] I will fight them all at once;  
God will be either on my side or on their side.  
The king said:  
—If I release the sixty all at once  
They will cut you into shreds.  
I feel for you! Stay for sixty days  
And fight them one by one.  
Sanasar said: —No, King,  
I cannot stay here for sixty days,  
Set out your sixty pahlevans all at once.  
The King sent word,  
Had the sixty pahlevans released all at once.  
Sanasar mounted Kourkig Jelaly,  
Drew the Lightning Sword and stood ready.  
The pahlevans bellowed like water buffalos  
And moved toward him.  
Sanasar and one of the pahlevans  
Engaged each other, clashed with each other,  
While Deghtzoun Dzam, at her window, watched the duel  
Sanasar fell upon them  
And began to strike the pahlevans with his sword.  
But they would not dare to engage him.  
They fought till nightfall.  
Sanasar chopped off the heads of twenty pahlevans.  
But the pahlevans kept on fighting during the night,  
Saying: —In the dark of the night  
We will fall upon him and kill him.  
He slayed ten more pahlevans until morning.  
They kept on battling from morning till night;  
He slaughtered ten more, leaving twenty.  
The corpses lay around Sanasar;  
Flowing blood formed a pool.  
Sanasar, soaked in blood, was caught in the pool,  
And could not wade out;  
Nor could they slay him.

[88] They moved around him, but would not dare attack him.  
Sanasar's hands were numbed;  
He could not battle effectively,  
Yet he could defend himself.  
The battle fell into a lull.

Now let us narrate about Baghdasar.

8.

Baghdasar was at Sassoun.  
While washing his hands one morning,  
His eyes fell on Sanasar's ring  
That Baghdasar had exchanged with his.  
The ring had turned black.  
—Ah, he said, hurry, get my horse ready,  
I must ride out, reach my brother.  
As he came out, he saw a dark cloud.  
He came in and said: —Alas, alas, Mother,  
My brother is in serious trouble.  
—How do you know? asked the mother.  
—A gray-haired man once pointed out that cloud to us  
And said: —When it gets dark,  
You twin brothers, if separated,  
Should know that one brother is in trouble,  
And the other one should rush to his aid.  
Now, I must hurry to reach Sanasar.  
His mother said: —My son, have patience—  
Patience prolongs life—  
Let us go in, have some food;  
Then you can hurry to your brother.

Baghdasar led his fiery horse [out of the stall],  
Saddled him, took his mace;  
Mounted the horse,  
Invoked God, and dashed away.

[89] In his hurry, he had no food.  
He rode on, reached the mountain  
Where the same giant shepherd, seeing  
A horseman riding like the wind, said:  
—This rider could be no one but Sanasar's brother.  
He came to Baghdasar and said:  
—Dismount, horseman, rest a little,  
I will give you some milk; drink it, then ride on.  
—Are you the devil? Baghdasar said to him,  
My brother is facing death at this moment,  
And you are asking me to have some milk. I must go.  
—You have no choice, replied the shepherd;  
Unless you have some milk, you cannot leave this place.  
To avoid a fight, Baghdasar dismounted.  
The shepherd filled his trough with milk,  
Put it before Baghdasar with some bread  
And left him to make the round of his sheep.

He made seven rounds of his flock  
As Baghdasar drank up the milk,  
Turned the trough over, and called:  
—Shepherd, come, take away the trough, I am on my way.  
The shepherd then said to him:  
—Baghdasar, your brother is  
Seven times stronger than you,  
Don't go against him;  
Ride on, your brother has slaughtered forty pahlevans,  
Leaving twenty for you to slay.  
You will both return safely.  
Have no fear.  
No one will overpower you.

Baghdasar dashed on,  
Reached the wall of Bghntzeh Kaghak.  
He saw forty gray-haired men standing there.  
They appeared so aged that  
Their garments and beards were turned yellow.  
[90] He saluted everyone present:  
—Greetings to you,  
White-bearded, red-bearded, brown-bearded men.

The eldest man greeted him in return and said:  
—Alas, alas, brave stripling, naïve young man,  
You, too, have come to fall  
Into the hands of that infidel maiden?  
He asked: —Why should I fall into the hands of an infidel?  
—Son, he replied, within an hour  
A bird, belonging to that maiden, will come and screech;  
You will be then transformed to a man of our age.  
Baghdasar asked: —Appo jan,  
Two, three days ago a young man like me  
Passed by this place, did you see him?  
The men replied:  
—The day before yesterday a man like you passed by us,  
But he was stronger, braver than you.  
He also was riding a fiery horse  
That flew him over the wall and landed him in the city.  
For two days we heard the sound of battle—  
The battle with the pahlevans—  
But today we have heard no sound,  
And we have no knowledge  
About the outcome of the battle.  
Baghdasar said then:  
—Alas, alas, that was my brother;  
He must have been slain  
If the sound of battle has stopped.  
I swear, from here on I am going to slay everyone,  
Destroy this city, and avenge my brother.  
He left the men and rode on.  
Anything he saw, anyone he met,  
Animal or man, he slew them all.  
He hurled his mace and wrecked the wall,

[91] Entered the city, approached the battleground.  
Sanasar and twenty pahlevans  
Were [still] engaged in battle—  
Sanasar so weary, hardly able to defend himself,  
His eyes bloodshot while he was still swinging his sword.  
Baghdasar rode on;  
Passing by a maiden's window, he asked:  
—Where is the battleground, young maiden?  
The maiden recognized him. She replied:  
—On your way to the city.  
Baghdasar kept riding,  
He reached the battleground; joined the battle.  
Starting at one end he slaughtered the pahlevans;  
Then he called: — Ey, Sanasar, brother!  
Sanasar heard his brother's voice.  
—God be praised, he said,  
My brother has come. I have nothing to fear.  
He shouted back: —Welcome, Brother Baghdasar,  
Have you come to my assistance?  
Baghdasar replied: —Yes, here I am.  
You hold on that side  
While I cut them down from this side.  
Baghdasar went over,  
Pulled his brother out of the blood pool; washed him.  
Sanasar opened his eyes. He asked:  
—There are twenty more pahlevans to contend with,  
Where are they?  
—I slew them all, said Baghdasar.

They went to the king.  
Seeing the twin brothers, the king said:  
—This was the fourth test;  
[Now] You will go to Ganatch Kaghak [Green City]  
When you return, you will have the maiden.

9.

[92] —Ganatch Kaghak, where are you? We are coming!  
They started, rode over arid land,  
Reached the city, went here and there,  
And finally knocked at the door of an old woman.  
She came and asked: —Who is there?  
They said: —We are harmless strangers, Mammig,  
Don't you want guests?  
She replied: —Why not, my lads,  
A guest comes from God.  
She opened the door, asked them in, saying:  
—I have no children.  
You will be my sons, I will be your mother;  
We will live together. God will provide for us.

At daybreak Sanasar asked Baghdasar:  
—Why did the King of Katcher send us to this city?  
What are we to do here?

Baghdasar replied:

—Brother, let us take a walk in the city.

We will do whatever God wills,

Until we see what the end will be.

They left their horses and arms with the old woman

And went to the city to walk around.

They stopped at the gate of the royal stable;

The stableman came and asked:

—Ey, fellows, who are you,

Would you like to be hostlers?

They said: —We would; we are strangers.

—Can you curry horses? he asked them.

They said: —Yes, we can.

The stableman took them to the stalls

And said: —Clean the stalls.

[93] Sanasar took the twig broom and Baghdasar the shovel.

Together they swept the stalls.

The stableman then said: —Now, curry the horses.

Sanasar asked: —Where is the curry comb?

—On the open shelf, there, said the stableman and left.

The curry combs that Sanasar handled

Crumbled in his hands.

He looked around in the stable

And saw a large object that looked like a curry comb—

A copper trough for watering the horses,

Filled with barley feed.

He emptied the trough on the floor

And used it to curry the horses.

He scraped the skin off the tail

Of every horse that he curried.

When the stableman returned and saw what had happened,

He shouted: —What is this you have done?

They replied: —We have rubbed their backs.

—Doom to your households!

You have killed all the horses.

The stableman went to the king,

Told him what had happened, and asked him:

—What shall we do with these men?

They have the strength of dragons.

The king said: —Let them stay,

In the morning we will send them to the mountain

To fight the dragon.

The boys returned to the old woman.

In the evening Baghdasar said:

—Mammig, I am thirsty; may I have a little water?

She said: —Death to me! There is no water.

Baghdasar asked: —What do you mean, Mammig?

She replied: —I would die for you, son!

Ganatch Kaghak is a city without water.

We have no water.

There is a spring on top of the hill.

[94] At the mouth of the spring  
There sits a dragon  
That has stopped the water flowing to the city;  
We are afraid to go there for water.  
Every week we have to take a virgin maiden to him.  
He will devour her, then release the water.  
If we don't do this, we will die of thirst,  
And our city will be destroyed.  
There is a maiden at the king's palace [now],  
It is her turn to be taken to the dragon tomorrow.  
—Mammig, can't you slay that dragon?  
She replied: —Who could ever slay that dragon?  
Many, many a time the king  
Has moved on him with his soldiers,  
[But] he has not been able to do anything to him.

At daybreak, the elderly woman said:  
—There's a hubbub outside;  
They are taking the maiden to the dragon.  
The boys looked; and, indeed,  
People in tears were taking to the spring  
A maiden, lovely as the moon,  
Dressed in black from head to foot.  
Women with water jugs were following them to the spring.  
The twin brothers walked behind them.  
No sooner than they came out of the city,  
[The king and] people told Sanasar and Baghdasar:  
—Take this maiden to the dragon,  
Battle with him, kill him.  
Sanasar and Baghdasar said to the king:  
—How can we battle with the dragon?  
We carry no arms.  
The king replied: —You know what to do.

Baghdasar said to Sanasar:  
—Let us go to that big house nearby;  
There are two round stones with holes in the center;  
[95] We will put our arms through the holes and carry them.  
The twin brothers went and took the stones.

But the owners of the stones  
Went to the king and complained:  
—We spent much money for those stones,  
And struggled hard to get them up.  
Those lads will cast them away at the hillside,  
And we will not be able to place them back.  
The king asked the brothers:  
—Will you return the stones  
Where you took them from?  
They replied: —Yes, we will return them  
Where we took them from.

They took the maiden and the stones  
And went to the place on top of the hill,



Where people tie and leave the maidens;  
The brothers told her: —Don't be afraid, maiden,  
Stay here, while we go and take [our] position  
Above and below the dragon.  
The maiden thought to herself:  
—I will escape now,  
Let the dragon come and devour them.  
But the dragon was not in sight. She was running away.  
They caught her and tied her.  
Sanasar said to his brother:  
—Take your position above, I will take mine below.  
I am afraid that if I stand above and hurl the stone,  
You will not be able to catch it  
When we hit and kill the dragon.  
And be careful, brother,  
The stones must not roll down, get lost in the valley.

A roar suddenly rent the mountains.  
They looked around. A huge beast appeared—  
A beast as big as a water buffalo but five times as long.  
[96] The dragon saw from the distance  
That instead of one, three persons  
Were waiting to be devoured by him.  
He was delighted.  
Sharpening his fangs, opening his mouth,  
Lashing his tail, and hissing,  
He was moving toward the maiden to devour her [first].  
Her teeth locked, her tongue tied [from fear],  
The maiden was weeping,  
With warm tears rolling down her face.  
The dragon came closer to them.  
—Catch my stone, brother, shouted Baghdasar,  
And hurled the stone.  
The stone hit the beast but did not kill it.  
Then Sanasar hurled a stone  
That shattered the ribs of the beast  
But did not get near his brother.  
They fell on the beast and  
Crushed his head with the stones.  
Picking up the stones, they came to the maiden  
And released her.  
—Go home, maiden, they said to her.  
The dragon, in a pool of blood, toppled and expired.  
The water of the spring, released,  
Started to flow freely;  
People carried the water home without stint or fear.  
Baghdasar said to Sanasar:  
—Let us roll the stones into the valley and go.  
Sanasar said: —Brother, have pity,  
The owners are Armenians,  
They cannot carry back those stones;  
Let us carry them back ourselves.  
They picked up the stones,  
Took along the maiden, returned to the city.

The maiden told the king all that she had seen.

The king summoned the brothers and asked them:

[97] —Did you return the stones, my lads?

They said: —Yes, we did. They are at the door.

Let the owners come and place them back,

We don't know where to place them;

We brought them as far as the door,

Let the owners carry them in.

—But they cannot haul those stones, said the king.

—How did they do it at the beginning? they asked.

The king replied:

—They hitched water buffalos and horses

To haul those stones to their places.

It is a new oil press that they have built.

Sanasar said: —Then, let them come,

Open the doors and point the place to us.

We will carry them and place them properly.

The owners went with the boys

And pointed out to them the place of the stones.

The boys placed back the stones,

And returned to the house of the old woman.

The following day the king summoned

Sanasar and Baghdasar and said to them:

—Ask for anything you wish, I will grant it to you.

Baghdasar said: —We ask for nothing

But the maiden we saved.

The king said again:

—Baghdasar, I will grant to you anything you wish.

The king made this offer three times in succession.

And for three times Baghdasar asked for nothing else.

The king then said:

—If you ask for nothing else [but the maiden],

The maiden you saved is already yours.

Come, Baghdasar, let me marry you to her.

Baghdasar, the lad, said:

—At the present I have no time to be married.

They betrothed the maiden to Baghdasar.

[98]

10.

The twin brothers bade farewell,

Left Ganatch Kaghak,

Returned to Bghntzeh Kaghak

And rode to the palace of the King of Katcher

To claim Deghtzoun by force and drag her away.

The king said: —Sanasar,

Deghtzoun is in her castle outside the city;

Hamdol, the dev ["devil/demon"], is guarding the gate,

Go and take her, if you can.

Baghdasar stayed in the city;  
Sanasar, the foolhardy of Sassoun,  
Took his weapons, mounted his horse and rode away.  
He saw a white castle perched on a rock.  
He approached the castle, saying to himself:  
—I will see if this is Deghtzoun Dzam's castle.  
Going to the gate, he saw  
A huge door at the entrance.  
He shouted: —Ey, open the gate.  
Hamdol, the dev, behind the gate, shouted back:  
—Who are you that I should open the gate?  
Sanasar replied: —Have you not heard of my name?  
Hamdol asked: —What is your name?  
Sanasar replied: —Don't you know my name?  
—No, I do not, answered Hamdol.  
Sanasar said: —I don't know, either,  
Although I have learned it from my mother.  
Hamdol asked: —What have you learned?  
Sanasar said: —You want to know what I have learned?  
I was a babe when my mother, tossing me up,  
Was calling me: 'Krogh ["soul-taker"] of Hamdol.'

[99] Hamdol said: —If you are my Krogh,  
Extend your finger through the opening of the gate.  
Sanasar said: —Here is my hand instead.  
And he extended his arm.  
Seeing his hand, Hamdol was amazed.  
He took the hand and squeezed it with both his hands;  
It felt as if a flea were biting the foolhardy of Sassoun;  
Hamdol could not hurt him.  
Sanasar said: —Hamdol, now you extend your hand.  
Hamdol extended his hand.  
As Sanasar squeezed it,  
The milk of Hamdol's mother's breast, mixed with blood,  
Gushed out of his fingernails.  
Hamdol ran away, went to Deghtzoun Dzam.  
She asked: —Why did you run away,  
What happened to you, Hamdol?  
Hamdol said: —Khatoun, there is a man outside,  
He asked me to open the gate. I did not.  
He squeezed my hand. The milk of my mother's breast  
Gushed out of my fingernails.  
—Could you not squeeze his hand? asked Deghtzoun Dzam.  
Hamdol said: —He extended his hand to me.  
It was not a hand. It was a block of wood.  
Deghtzoun Dzam asked:  
—Didn't you ask what his name is?  
Hamdol replied: Yes, I did, but he said:  
—When I was a babe, my mother, tossing me up,  
Used to call me 'Krogh of Hamdol.'  
Deghtzoun said: —Probably he is  
One of the foolhardies of Sassoun.  
Hamdol asked her: —Who are the foolhardies of Sassoun?  
Deghtzoun said: —Sanasar and Baghdasar.

They are the ones who have built  
An enormous dwelling place  
And have named it Sassoun, the House of Sassoun.

—Bang! bang! Someone pounded at the door  
[100] And shouted: —Open the door; if you do not,  
I will smash your door and chimney over your skull.  
Gripped by fear, Hamdol was paralyzed hand and foot.  
Looking from the window, Deghtzoun saw that  
It was Sanasar, the foolhardy of Sassoun.  
Putting on her slippers, she ran out, opened the gate.  
—My lord, you are welcome as a crown over my head.  
Sanasar dismounted.  
Placing their hands around each other's shoulder,  
They entered the castle.  
Hamdol fled like a flea.  
Deghtzoun said: —I would die for your sun, your soul,  
Sanasar, may it be well! What would you wish?  
Sanasar replied:  
—I have come to take you as my wife.  
Deghtzoun Dzam said:  
—I submit to your wish, Light of My Eyes!  
Shall I ever find a brave man like you?  
As she faced Sanasar, he realized that she was  
Seven times more beautiful than what he had seen  
In his dream and in her picture.  
Then and there they exchanged rings [in betrothal].

Deghtzoun Dzam then said: —Sanasar,  
Thousand pities! You have been risking  
Your youthful life by coming for me.  
—Why the pity? asked Sanasar.  
Deghtzoun replied:  
—I am afraid that they may kill you.  
This is a land of magic spell,  
Let us depart at night,  
So that people shall not see us or hear of us.  
If they see us or hear of us,  
They will not let you take me away.  
Sanasar said to her:  
[101] —I am not afraid; I am leaving at daytime;  
There is no need for further talk.  
Then he added: —If you are coming,  
Jump on my horse, I will take you with me;  
If you are not coming, give me your final word,  
Then I will return to Sassoun.  
—Why shouldn't I come? said Deghtzoun Dzam,  
My heart, my soul is only for you.  
I sent for you, brought you here to go with you.

Before she finished saying this, she sprang on his horse;  
Sanasar spurred on, off they went.  
On their way Sanasar greeted  
Every rock, bush, and beast that they passed by,

Until they reached the border of the land.  
On the way they met an ugly beast  
That Sanasar did not greet.  
The beast then raised its voice to the sky  
And yelled aloud:  
—Ah, he took her away, he took her away,  
Sanasar took the maiden Deghtzoun Dzam away.

The rock heard this voice, relayed it to the bush,  
The bush relayed it to the tree, the tree to the animals,  
Until the voice reached the city.  
People in the city told one another;  
All came together  
And sallied forth for battle.  
Mounted men in great numbers  
Began to pursue Sanasar.  
The sand of the sea could be counted,  
The stars in the sky could be counted,  
The grass on the ground could be counted,  
But the horsemen could not be counted.

Sanasar took Deghtzoun Dzam  
To the top of the mountain  
[102] And came back to face the mounted warriors.  
Invoking: —In your name, Eternal Father,  
Battle Cross on my right arm.  
He drew his Lightning Sword, and,  
Hungry and thirsty, he cut to pieces the mounted hordes.  
People from the city, rushing from all sides,  
Took their stand before the huge gate of the castle.  
Sanasar was now battling amongst them,  
Slashing, slaying them, and pressing on.  
Before long he saw that  
Men on the castle grounds were fleeing  
And taking refuge in the city,  
While men from the city were fleeing to the castle.  
It was foolhardy Baghdasar who, on the other end,  
Was slaughtering them and pressing forward.

Baghdasar [in that melee] singled out a white horseman,  
Who, drenched in blood,  
Had fallen upon the mounted men  
And was slaughtering them.  
He shouted: —Get ready! You must be  
The one trying to kill my brother!  
Here I come to dispatch your soul to the Creator.  
Swinging his mace back and forth,  
He [hurled it and] hit his brother on the chest,  
Who fell back on the rump of his horse.  
But regained his saddle quickly.  
Hurling another mace, Baghdasar threw him off his seat,  
But Sanasar regained his saddle again  
And chanted:  
—Glory to you, Benevolent Lord;

High is the providence of the Great King.  
That was my foolhardy brother's hit,  
That was my foolhardy Baghdasar's blow.

Hearing these words, Baghdasar realized that  
He had struck his brother. He said to him:  
[103] —You were drenched in blood, I could not recognize you.  
Couldn't you recognize me  
And couldn't you warn me not to hit you?  
Baghdasar then asked Sanasar:  
—Did you bag any game?  
Or are you returning with empty hands?  
Sanasar replied:  
—I bagged the daughter of the King of Katcher;  
She is on top of the yonder mountain.  
Sanasar took his brother to the maiden  
And with a wink gave her the hint  
To kiss his brother's hand.  
She readily kissed Baghdasar's hand.  
Very pleased with this [respectful greeting],  
Baghdasar said: —Sister-to-be,  
Will you wash my brother's bloody garments?  
I will tend to the remaining fighters.  
Hardly had he said this  
When Baghdasar took his [arms and] spear,  
Fell upon the horsemen and slaughtered them,  
Leaving only those  
Who had not ventured out of their homes.  
He spared not even one to tell the tale.

In this way the twin brothers,  
One on one side, one on the other side,  
Slaughtered all the mounted forces,  
Wreaking havoc among them.  
The King of Katcher then came and begged them:  
—Foolhardies of Sassoun,  
For God's sake, stop your slaughter of my men.  
I will grant anything you ask for,  
Be it my daughter, be it my kingdom,  
I will grant you both.  
The twin brothers said:  
We want your daughter, we are taking her.

11.

[104] They took Deghtzoun to the forty gray-haired men  
At the city wall,  
Dismounted her, set her face to face  
[With the former wooers].  
Sanasar said to her:  
—Deghtzoun, these forty men came to seek your hand.  
You cast a magic spell and reduced them to this condition.  
Will you now lift that spell

And restore these men to their former state?  
Deghtzoun Dzam said: —These men came for me;  
If I restore them and restore their strength,  
They will fight against you.  
You take me away.  
—No, that will never do, said Sanasar.  
Then the maiden cast another magic spell,  
Summoned her bird.  
No sooner had the bird screeched,  
The men regained their youthfulness.  
—Very well, said Sanasar.

Taking the maiden aside, Sanasar went to the men  
And said: —Brave pahlevans,  
You all came for this maiden,  
Ready to challenge and willing to fight  
For winning her hand.  
We, too, came for this maiden;  
We, twin brothers, challenged,  
Fought, and won our battle,  
Took this maiden, and brought her here.  
Now that you have regained your strength,  
Let her stand aside while we fight over her.  
If you overpower us, the maiden will be yours;  
If we overpower you, the maiden will remain with us.  
The pahlevans said:  
—Ey, Sanasar, Baghdasar,  
[105] You were the ones who liberated us,  
Restored to us our strength.  
How could we accept your bid to fight?  
We dare not fight you;  
Brother, we will not fight.  
We will return to our lands.

Then Sanasar asked: —Brother pilgrims,  
Would you wish me to take this maiden,  
Enjoy life with her?  
They all said:  
—Take her, fare well with her,  
Enjoy life with her. . . . Felicitations!  
The forty men bade farewell,  
Set forth to their lands, returned to their homes.  
Sanasar and Baghdasar took the maiden  
And started for Sassoun.  
—Brother, said Sanasar to Baghdasar,  
You marry Deghtzoun.  
—No, I will not marry her, replied Baghdasar.  
It was to you she sent twofold greetings.  
You fought for her, you should marry her.  
Who has ever seen a brother marry  
His brother's betrothed? Who has ever heard of it?  
I will marry my own betrothed,  
The maiden we saved from the dragon.

No one knows how far or near they had travelled,  
When they saw a horseman, dressed in blue,  
Coming to them, and shouting: —Hey, you scoundrels,  
That celestial houri is meant for me,  
Where are you taking her?  
Sanasar said: —Brother, hold my horse,  
I will go and see what he is saying.  
—O blackguard, said Baghdasar,  
[106] You always take up the challenge,  
I am taking it up this time.  
Sanasar said: —Go and take it;  
Why are you annoyed?

Baghdasar galloped ahead [faced the horseman];  
They exchanged words, both dismounted,  
Flew at each other;  
Baghdasar picked him up  
And threw him down on the ground.  
[Rendered helpless,] She unbuttoned her garments,  
Uncovered her breasts and said: —Baghdasar,  
That maiden you are taking is my sister.  
I ran away [from her] seven years ago  
Because of the suffering she inflicted on people  
Through magic spells that she cast on them.  
Like [the bird] *haramic* [a native wild bird of Armenia], I took flight to the hills,  
Then fled to Ganatch Kaghak,  
To the court of its king.  
When I heard that you had broken her magic spell  
And taken her for Sanasar,  
I decided to come to you as your betrothed.

The two brothers and two maidens,  
All four, together rode on to Sassoun.  
They sent word to their mother:  
—We are bringing the daughters of the King of Katcher,  
Deghtzoun Dzam of Forty Braids and her sister.  
Get together the trumpeters, drummers,  
And minstrels for our wedding.  
Dzovinar, their mother, then brought together  
Forty trumpeters, forty drummers, forty minstrels,  
And assembled all the people of the city.  
Deghtzoun Dzam was wedded to Sanasar  
And her sister was wedded to Baghdasar.  
[107] For forty days and nights  
They made merry with wedding feasts.

Baghdasar then took his wife to Baghdad,  
Sanasar remained in Sassoun;  
Baghdasar did not have a son;  
To Sanasar God gave a son who was named Vergo.  
A few years later two other sons were born to him—  
One son was named Tzenov Hovan [Hovan with a loud voice],  
The other son was named Mher.  
Among these children Vergo amounted to nothing.



Tzenov Hovan had such a powerful voice  
That he wrapped himself with seven buffalo hides  
In order not to burst when he shouted.  
Mher was the son more gifted than the other two.

Time went on.  
Sanasar's days came to an end. He passed away.  
Dzovinar Khanum and others—all passed away,  
Leaving behind Kerry Toros, Deghtzoun,  
Vergo, Tzenov Hovan, and Mher.

We will now tell of Mher.

**(Continued on Next Page)**

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# David of Sassoun

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[Page 111]

## *Medz Mher*

### Part I

#### *Medz Mher Administers Sassoun*

[112]

1.

Again, I pray for mercy  
On Deghtzoun Jewgh Dzam [Golden Braids]—  
A thousand mercies.

Again, I pray for mercy  
On Kerry Toros—  
A thousand mercies.

Again, I pray for mercy  
On Tzenov Hovan—  
A thousand mercies.

Again, I pray for mercy  
On Medz Mher—  
A thousand mercies.

Again, I pray for mercy  
On Armaghan—  
A thousand mercies.

Again, I pray for mercy  
On Ismil Khatoun—  
I will pray for mercy.

[113]

2.

After the death of Sanasar, Tzenov Hovan said to Vergo:  
—As our elder brother  
You are the heir to Sassoun now.  
—Ya? said Vergo, I am not able to rule Sassoun;  
I have been disabled for years.  
One day as I lifted and hurled Sanasar's mace,

I suffered a rupture.  
They sat in council and decided:  
—As Sanasar's sons are still young,  
We will have Karsoun Jewgh Deghtzoun Dzam rule  
Until the boys come of age.  
Coming out of her confinement,  
Deghtzoun Jewgh Dzam mounted Kourkig Jelaly  
And roamed the mountains.  
One should have seen her and her horse—  
A mother-of-pearl saddle on his back,  
A steel bit in his mouth.  
Wearing her armour of iron, and shoes of steel,  
With Sanasar's staff in her hand,  
She rode over the mountains.  
In this manner Deghtzoun ruled Sassoun  
For a number of years.

3.

In the domain of the Khalif of Baghdad  
There was a man named Msrah Melik,  
Who was the ruler of Msr [Great City].  
Hearing of the death of Sanasar,  
He marched on Sassoun  
[114] And levied an annual tribute of  
Forty sterile bulls,  
Forty *kodes* [pails] of gold, and  
Forty virgin maidens.  
Thus, for a number of years,  
Sassoun remained tributary to Melik.

4.

At seven years of age  
Mher grew to be seven stories tall.  
They sent him to friary school,  
Where he studied and learned the proprieties.  
One day Mher said to his mother:  
—Mother, I have been kept at home long enough;  
Give me leave to go to the highlands and mountains,  
To hunt fowl and beast, and enter the ranks of men.  
Deghtzoun Jewgh Dzam said:  
—Mher, you are still young, wait a few more years.  
—But, Mother, said Mher,  
As we have no man in our household  
The devs [foes] will fall upon us, will do us harm.  
I should be prepared now to face the foe.  
Deghtzoun Jewgh Dzam realized that  
She could not hold the boy down;  
She gave her consent.  
Mher then went out to hunt.  
He roamed the plains and mountains,

Hunting during the day, coming home to sleep at night.  
He went on foot; he had no horse.  
One day, while on the hunt,  
He chased foxes all day without bagging any game.  
Angry and tired, he returned home in the evening  
And threw his staff on the floor.  
Kerry Toros asked: —Why are you angry, lad?

[115] Mher said: —Kerry Toros,  
Curse on this sort of game!  
I ran after beasts all day, I chased them all day,  
But they all escaped, I could not reach them.  
I shot at them with my bow and arrow,  
But could not hit them.  
Now I am back home, empty-handed.  
Ah, Kerry, [if you only knew] how tired I am!  
Mher had become heavy, he could not run fast.  
And when he ran, his feet sank in the ground.  
His uncle said: —You, foolhardy of Sassoun—  
Must all Sassounites be foolhardy?  
How can a man run after game  
And catch animals by hand?  
—What should I do then, Kerry? asked Mher.  
—Mher, my boy, said his mother,  
Prince Korkig in Bitlis has many horses of fiery breed,  
He is a kin of ours; go to him;  
Don't waste yourself, get a horse,  
Bring it home, so that you can ride when you go hunting.  
—Mother, said Mher, put aside  
One or two loaves of bread for me.  
At daybreak I will start for Bitlis.

5.

Mher rose at daybreak,  
Took two loaves of millet bread, put them in his belt,  
Pulled up a tree and carrying it across his shoulders,  
He took to the road:  
—Plains of Bitlis, I am coming!  
After a rest at the plain of Maranik,  
He continued his journey to Bitlis  
And entered the upper section of the city  
Where young boys were playing.  
The boys saw a man coming—  
A big man carrying across his shoulders a large tree  
[116] As big as a ceiling beam.  
They wondered and said:  
—Who can this man be,  
Carrying a beam across his shoulders?  
Mher asked the young boys:  
—Where is the house of Prince Korkig?  
The boys gathered around him and said:  
—Come, we will take you to Prince Korkig's house.  
They took him to the gate of the house.

Mher put down his staff [beam] and went in.  
He saw Prince Korkig sitting in his chamber,  
Holding council with his elders.  
Mher saluted them.  
Prince Korkig ignored his salutation.  
Seeing him sitting at the head of the council,  
Mher thought: —He must be Prince Korkig.  
Mher went to him, seized his arm,  
Lifted him and stood him on his feet—  
Giving a mild twist to his arm.  
Korkig felt as if his arm was broken at seven places.  
—Where are you from, brave lad? asked Korkig.  
—I am from Sassoun, replied Mher.  
—Whose son are you, my boy?  
—I am the son of Sanasar.  
—You are welcome, my lad, a thousand times welcome.  
Korkig feigned friendship.  
Seeing Mher's strength, he wanted to placate him.  
—Bring food for the lad, he said [to an attendant].

Mher sat down, rested a while, ate his food.  
Korkig then asked him: —What is your name, my boy?  
—My name is Mher.  
—Mher, my boy, why have you come to me?  
—Uncle, said Mher, I have become so heavy  
That when I go to hunt in the mountains  
I cannot run after wolves and beasts,  
They run away and escape capture.  
[117] I have come to ask you to give me a horse,  
So that I can ride when I go hunting.  
If you will give me one, give it to me now;  
If you will not, I will leave immediately.

Korkig said: —Mher lad, I would die for you.  
Is it one horse you want? I will give you ten.  
There are forty horses in the stable.  
Go and take the one you choose to ride.

6.

They went to sleep that night.  
At daybreak they were served their morning meal;  
Then Korkig called the stableboy  
And said: —Take Mher to the stalls.  
Give him the horse he chooses to ride.  
Mher went to the stalls with the stableboy,  
And what did he see?  
Twenty horses in one row of stalls  
And twenty horses in another row,  
With mother-of-pearl saddles on their backs  
And steel bits in their mouths.  
—Mher lad, I would die for you, said the stableboy,  
Take any horse you like.  
Mher walked up and down the row of stalls.

He slapped the back of every horse; and [under the slap]  
Every one of the horses dropped its belly to the ground.  
After trying the forty horses, Mher said:  
—There is not one horse [here] that can serve me,  
What can I do with them if I take them?  
I slapped every horse,  
And every one's belly touched the ground.  
How will they support me?

As he was coming out of the stable,  
He saw a two-year-old,  
[118] Plump, shaggy colt capering about.  
Mher thought to himself:  
—I found no horse there that would serve me.  
Let me try this colt with one blow;  
If he falls dead, I will leave.  
People will know then how strong I am.  
Saying this, he struck a blow  
That only brushed the rump of the colt.  
The colt jumped in frenzy,  
Showing the strength of ten horses,  
And struck the wall with his hoofs.  
If he had hit Mher,  
Mher would have landed in Sassoun.  
The colt's kick hit the stone of the manure pit  
And drew sparks. Mher then said:  
The Cross be my witness! This is the colt  
That will support me.  
I know my strength well.  
The blow I gave would have killed any other horse.  
I will take this colt, if Prince Korkig gives it to me;  
If he does not, I will leave and go.

7.

Mher returned to the chamber of the prince.  
Korkig asked him:  
—Mher, lad, which horse did you select?  
—I do not wish to take one single horse  
From your stable [Mher said].  
Give me the shaggy colt if you will;  
If you will not, I will leave for home.  
—Mher, my boy, replied the uncle,  
I am Prince Korkig, I would feel ashamed  
To give you a colt.  
People would say Sanasar's son came,  
Prince Korkig refused to give him a thoroughbred horse.  
—No, Uncle, no, said Mher,  
[119] That colt is the only one I ask for;  
If you give it to me, I will take it;  
If you do not, I will go.  
—As you wish, lad, said Prince Korkig.  
I will not persuade you to make another choice;  
If you want that colt, take it.

The stableboy put a halter on the colt's neck,  
Brought him out of the stable  
And handed the halter to Mher.  
Mher tried to lead the colt,  
The colt would not budge.  
He asked for a rope. They brought it to him.  
Mher tied the colt's four feet securely together,  
Thrust a beam between its legs,  
Lifted the colt to his shoulders and bade:  
—Farewell, Uncle, Lord's bounty on your house!  
Mher started for home, exclaiming:  
—Sassoun, I am coming . . .  
People of Bitlis, young and old, are inclined to deviltry.  
Seeing Mher carrying a horse on his shoulder,  
They gathered around him and  
—Hoo, hoo, hooted him,  
—Poo, poo, ridiculed him.  
Mher paid no attention to their shouts.  
He kept on his way . . . and reached Sassoun.

8.

Kerry Toros saw Mher coming,  
With a colt slung over his shoulder.  
He asked: —What a shaggy colt, lad,  
Is that the best you could get,  
Couldn't you get a thoroughbred from Korkig?  
—You are right, Kerry, Mher replied,  
Prince Korkig had forty horses in his stable;  
Every one of the good-for-naughts that I slapped,  
Dropped its belly to the ground.

[120] There was not one horse that could serve me;  
But when I struck a blow that brushed  
The rump of this colt,  
He jumped in frenzy, showing the strength of ten horses;  
With his hoofs he kicked the stone of the manure pit  
And drew sparks from it.  
—Then you have a fiery colt, said Kerry Toros;  
Bring him in, I will take good care of him.  
At the end of three months you will ride him.

Kerry Toros was a veterinarian, a good judge of horses.  
He took the colt, trained him for three months,  
And after breaking him in, gave him to Mher to ride.

Mher became a fine horseman,  
Rode throughout the land of Sassoun.  
Going to the chase on horseback,  
He hunted the beasts of the countryside,  
Brought the game to the city  
And gave it to all the people of Sassoun.  
In this way he fed Sassoun for seven years.

There came a day when Sassoun  
 Suffered great scarcity of grain [for bread].  
 Mher was fifteen years old then.  
 People came and clamoured at his door for help:  
 —Mher, we will perish from famine,  
 For the sake of God, get some grain for us.  
 —I don't know what to do, said Mher.  
 I will ask Kerry Toros,  
 He will know the cause of this famine.

Mher went to Kerry Toros and said:  
 —Uncle, our people are suffering from famine,  
 Can you get some food?  
 [121] —Son, replied the uncle,  
 What can I do? There is no grain in the land.  
 If there is any grain,  
 It will be found in your father's granaries.  
 —What is the cause of this scarcity of grain?  
 Was it hail or wind or scorching heat  
 [That destroyed the harvest] ? asked Mher.  
 —No, none of those, replied Kerry Toros,  
 We raise little grain in our land,  
 We raise goats, cattle, and donkeys,  
 We get our grain from Damascus and Alep.  
 There is a lion roaming the countryside; he would devour  
 Anyone going to the hillside to plough the land.  
 The beast has blocked all the roads;  
 No one dares to travel from Damascus to Sassoun,  
 Or from Sassoun to Damascus.  
 That is why we have no grain,  
 That is why we have famine in our land.  
 Mher asked: —Kerry, what is a lion like?  
 What kind of a being is a lion?  
 —The lion is the king of beasts.  
 He devours men, replied Kerry Toros.  
 —Does he devour people from afar or  
 When they are near? asked Mher.  
 —When they are near, replied Kerry Toros.  
 —Then I will go and face him at daybreak, said Mher.  
 —No, lad, don't go, he will kill you, said Kerry.  
 Mher paid no attention. He went.  
 In the morning whoever could set his feet in a stirrup,  
 Whoever could mount a horse, joined Mher.  
 All rode out to track the lion.  
 The lion saw someone coming.  
 He left his lair and stalked;  
 Lashing his tail, he raised a mighty dust,  
 And facing Mher, awaited him.  
 Mher asked his followers:  
 —What is that, facing us?

[122] —That is the lion, they replied.



Mher said: —Anyone who attempts to kill the lion  
With a sword, I will leave the lion,  
Turn on that man and kill him myself.  
The mother of that lion invoked God  
When she gave birth to him.  
My mother, too, invoked God when she gave birth to me.  
I will lay aside my garments  
And grapple with him barehanded.  
His followers stood at a distance,  
Mher went alone . . .  
He and the lion came to grips.  
Invoking —In the name of the Bread and Wine  
And the Eternal Lord,  
Mher grasped the lion's upper jaw with one hand,  
And the lower jaw with his other hand,  
Tore the lion apart—into two pieces,  
Laid one piece on one side  
And the other piece on the other side of the road.

His followers came, stood beside him,  
While one of them ran to Sassoun with the news  
To Mher's mother: —Light unto your eyes!  
Mher killed the lion.  
Until that day he was called Mher,  
From that day on he was named Lion-like Mher.

Mher returned to Sassoun.  
People of Sassoun then came to him and hailed him:  
—You are our lord now, you will rule our land.  
When people of Sassoun proclaimed Mher as their ruler,  
His mother, Karsoun Jewgh Dzam Deghtzoun, gave him  
The fiery horse, Kourkig Jelaly,  
The Lightning Sword,  
The armoured helmet,  
[123] The girdle,  
And the velvet cloak.  
Mher mounted Kourkig Jelaly,  
Held the Lightning Sword,  
And rode around his father's lands.  
All his enemies bowed their heads to him.

10.

And time passed.  
One day Kerry Toros, the lords and elders,  
Went to Deghtzoun Dzam's chamber and said to her:  
—Why don't you have Sanasar's son married?  
They held council;  
At daybreak Kerry Toros, Hovan and many valourous men  
Mounted their horses and set out on a journey.  
They went to King Melkon.  
King Melkon asked them: —Why have you come to me?  
Kerry Toros said: —O King, we have come  
To ask you to do something for us.

—What can I do for you? asked the king.  
Kerry Toros replied:  
—O King, find a good maiden for us—  
A city-bred or country-bred maiden,  
So that we can take her to Sassoun  
And marry her to Mher.  
King Melkon said: —Let us go to Manatzkert and ask for  
Armaghan, the daughter of King Tevatoros [Winged Toros].

King Melkon, his vizier and ministers,  
Kerry Toros and his valourous men,  
Rode on to the fortress of Manatzkert  
Where Tevatoros lived.  
They stopped at the gate of the fortress  
And asked: —Is Tevatoros at home?  
[124] [The gate keeper] replied:  
—Tevatoros is gone to Van.  
They went to Van after breakfast.  
At Van they asked: —Is Tevatoros here?  
—No, [an attendant] replied,  
He laid the foundation of the fort,  
Had his meal and left for Arzroum.  
They went to Arzroum at noon,  
And asked: —Is Tevatoros here?  
[An attendant] replied:  
—He laid the foundation of the fort,  
Had his noon-meal, and left for Kars.  
They reached Kars and asked: —Is Tevatoros here?  
[An attendant] replied:  
—He laid the foundation of the fort,  
Had his dinner, and left for the fortress of Manatzkert.  
Word was sent to Tevatoros that:  
—King Melkon, Kerry Toros,  
Hovan, and their valourous men  
Are on their way to be your guests.

King Tevatoros sent his men to meet them;  
He greeted them;  
Assigned separate quarters to the princes,  
And separate quarters to their valourous men.  
They sat down to have dinner;  
After they had their dinner,  
Tevatoros said to King Melkon:  
—You are welcome, O King,  
What has occasioned this visit [to me]?  
—We have come to you  
To establish a marital kinship.  
—What sort of marital kinship? he asked.  
—We are asking you to give your daughter, Armaghan,  
To our Mher.  
—Whose son is Mher? he asked.  
—Mher is the son of Sanasar, they replied.  
[125] Tevatoros said: —Melkon, Kerry Toros, Hovan,  
Since you have come to me, I would readily

Give my daughter to you [if she were free];  
But it is seven years since she has been a captive  
In the hands of Sbidag Dev [White Dev] the Lord of Khlat.  
Armaghan will be Mher's, if he can set her free.

Let them carry on their talk,  
While we tell about Sbidag Dev.

11.

In those days Sbidag Dev was the King of Khlat.  
He had heard of Mher's fame that was spreading  
Throughout the world day by day.  
He thought to himself:  
—There will be a day, soon or late,  
When Mher will destroy me and capture Khlat.  
Sbidag Dev then wrote a letter,  
Gave it to pahlevan Kamy [Wind]  
Who took the letter to Sassoun.

On that day Mher was hunting in the mountains;  
Pahlevan Kamy suddenly stood before him and said:  
—Greetings to you, Mher,  
Have you grown so big that you dare  
To come to the mountains for hunting?  
Be it known to you that Sbidag Dev  
Is challenging you to a fight.  
He handed the letter to Mher.  
The letter read:  
—Come, fight with me.  
Mher took the letter and said:  
[126] —So be it. Get ready. I am coming.  
The dev who brought the message said:  
—Mher, I have a request;  
Do me a good turn; do what I beg you.  
—My word is my bond, said Mher,  
If you are devs,  
We are the brave warriors of Sassoun.  
We harbor no deceit. What is it you beg?  
The dev said: —Be it known to you that  
We do not like Sbidag Dev.  
We want you to come and kill him  
So that we can be freed from him.  
—I will, said Mher.

Mher returned home, kissed his mother's hand,  
And said: You should know that  
Sbidag Dev has sent a letter to me  
And challenged me to a fight.  
Karsoun Jewgh Dzam Deghtzoun said:  
—I would die for you [son], you are a young lad,  
How can you fight him?  
He is the most powerful among the kings;  
No sword can strike him down.  
Have a little more patience, Mher, [wait] until you grow,

Then go and fight with him.  
—It is good to have patience, Mother, said Mher,  
But I gave my word to the Dev. I am going.  
—Very well, she said, you may go.  
But you must heed my word:  
Mount Kourkig Jelaly,  
He is your father's horse, capable of any feat;  
Put on Sanasar's armour,  
His steel boots on your feet,  
His iron helmet on your head;  
[127] Carry his quiver, bow and arrows on your back,  
Hold his mace in your hand,  
Girdle yourself with the Lightning Sword and ride on.  
Heeding his mother's word,  
Mher took up his father's armour,  
Mounted Kourkig Jelaly, and rode off.

Mher rode on, until he reached  
Sbidag Dev's pasture land atop a high mountain.  
It was springtime.  
The mountain was decked  
With myriads of flowers and sorrel.  
Sbidag Dev and his imps had come to camp there.

12.

On his way to Sbidag Dev's camp Mher became thirsty.  
He searched for water through the hills and valleys;  
When he saw two giant devs standing watch at a spring  
And filling a buffalo-hide bag with water,  
Mher greeted them and asked:  
—Will you let me take a drink of water?  
—This spring belongs to Sbidag Dev [one of them said],  
No one is allowed to drink water from it,  
Except the Dev himself.  
—Brother mine, said Mher, I beg you,  
Give me some water so that I can drink it  
And go on my way.  
—No, they said, Sbidag Dev has sworn us  
To keep watch at this spring  
And send word to him when a stranger comes here.

Mher lost his patience,  
Fought with the devs, killed one of them and  
Wounded the other one who escaped.  
Mher took a long drink of water,  
Then, following the bloody track of the wounded dev,  
[128] He reached an eerie cave at a wild, desolate spot.  
Flames were shooting out of the cave.  
At the entrance of the cave Mher saw  
A fiery houri [fairy] maiden, tied to a tree,  
Who was wiping the blood of the wounded dev.  
Mher went there, caught the dev,  
Tied his hands and feet, placed a rock over him,

And freed the maiden from her bonds.  
The beautiful maiden stood up  
And saw what a handsome and brave young man Mher was.  
She was overwhelmed,  
Her heart began to throb,  
And she exclaimed: —O brave lad,  
The bird on its wings, the snake on its belly  
Cannot find their way to this cave,  
How did you [find your way]?  
Mher asked her: —How did it happen  
That you came to these mountains?  
The maiden gave a deep sigh:  
—Ah, do not ask me that question.  
For seven years I have been suffering  
In the hands of Sbidag Dev.  
That wicked creature, Sbidag Dev,  
Attacked our land;  
While I was strolling in our royal garden,  
He suddenly came, seized me,  
Carried me away in an instant,  
And brought me here.  
He tried to take me for his wife,  
But by the grace of God,  
I gathered strength to resist him.  
He could not possess me.  
To this day I still remain a virgin.  
You should know, she said, I had a dream.  
[129] In that dream I was told that  
Most of my suffering is over,  
That there will come a warrior, named Mher,  
Who will kill Sbidag Dev and set me free.  
—But where is Sbidag Dev? asked Mher.  
—Nine days ago he went to Sev Sar [Black Mountain] on a pilgrimage,  
He will return today, said Armaghan.  
For his strength he is dependent on a black ox.  
Riding the black ox,  
Sbidag Dev roams around and devastates the land.  
No one can withstand his might.  
The man who slays the black ox  
Will put an end to Sbidag Dev.

Mher said no more. He sprang on his horse  
And rode on to Sev Sar.  
Among the marshes at Sev Sar  
Mher came upon the black ox.  
He said his prayer, drew his Lightning Sword  
And pierced the belly of the black ox.  
The ox bellowed, rose on his hind legs,  
Tottered and fell dead.  
Mher turned his horse,  
Returned to the cave and sat at the entrance.

Sbidag Dev had feasted and amused himself  
To his heart's content. He had become thirsty.  
With his eyes pinned to the road,  
He was watching eagerly for the devs  
Who were to bring water to him. The devs did not come.  
He said to himself:  
[130] —They must have been held by a strong man.  
He quickly mounted the Kamy [speedy, wind-like]-horse  
And rode to the spring.  
On his way he saw a man, the size of a huge rock,  
Sitting at the entrance of the cave,  
And a fiery horse, unbridled, grazing nearby.  
—Hey, earth-born, roared Sbidag Dev,  
The bird on its wings, the snake on its belly  
Cannot make their way to this cave,  
How did you dare to come here?  
—You had challenged me to a fight. I am Mher;  
I have come to fight. Come, let us fight.  
Fight as hard as you can.

Hearing Mher's challenge, Sbidag Dev quailed,  
Terror froze his hands and feet.  
Feigning joy, he said:  
—Ah, Mher, I welcome you,  
Come, let us go to my tent,  
Eat and drink until daybreak,  
Then we will see on whose side God will be.  
—No, said Mher, our grandfathers have advised us  
To fight the enemy as soon as we face him.

Sbidag Dev and Medz Mher, on horseback,  
Rushed at each other.  
They fought for three days and three nights.  
Mher kept striking Sbidag Dev.  
His blows sank deep into his frame  
As if his body were a batch of dough.  
At the end of three days Mher slew Sbidag Dev.  
He took Armaghan on his horse and quickly rode away.

[131]

14.

At sunset Mher reached Sassoun.  
Kerry Toros and Tzenov Hovan had just returned home.  
They sent word to Tevatoros  
That Mher has set his daughter free.  
Tevatoros and his ministers mounted their horses  
And rode to Sassoun.  
Houri Armaghan [the daughter of Tevatoros]  
They wedded to Mher,  
Held a wedding feast;  
For seven days and seven nights  
They ate, drank pomegranate wine and made merry.

At the end of seven days Tevatoros and his ministers  
Returned to their city.

News reached Khlat that Mher had slain Sbidag Dev.  
In great rejoicing the people of Khlat  
Came to Medz Mher and took him to their city.  
The devs of Khlat rose against Mher,  
Fought him, and would not let him enter the city.  
Mher drew his Lightning Sword,  
Fell upon them and slew them all;  
Then he returned to Sassoun.

**(Continued on Next Page)**

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# David of Sassoun

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[Page 133]

## *Medz Mher*

### Part II

#### *Medz Mher's Fight against Msrah Melik*

1.

[134] [At that time] Msrah Melik was still alive.  
Hearing of Mher's deeds of bravery,  
Msrah Melik became furious—  
Was not Sassoun a tributary of Melik?  
But Mher knew nothing of this  
And had not paid any tax to Melik.  
Melik issued orders [to his envoys]:  
—Go to Sassoun,  
Tell Mher to prepare to have a fight with me.  
The pahlevans of Msrah Melik came to Mher and said:  
—Melik challenges you to a fight.  
Mher said: If he is asking for a fight,  
Let him come. We will see what he wants from us.  
Hearing this, Tzenov Hovan said:  
—Mher, you are a big man, intelligent;  
Ride to Msr. Go to Msrah Melik,  
Treat him amicably, know the man,  
Be friendly with him. Ask him to lower our tax.  
It is heavy. We cannot pay it.

Mher then said: —God spare your household, Hovan,  
I did not know, and you did not tell me  
That we pay tax to Melik.

2.

Saying this, Mher mounted Kourkig Jelaly,  
Rode to the outskirts of Msr.  
Msrah Melik was sitting on the stone bench  
At the great gate of his mansion,  
When in the distance he saw a rider  
Who looked like a huge fort mounted on a horse  
[135] That was dashing like a hurricane.  
The rider, Mher, arrived, greeted him.  
Msrah Melik was awed at the sight of this giant.  
From fright he could not return his greeting.  
Melik said to himself:



—Such a man on earth! Could that be possible?  
He ordered [the attendants]: —Hold his horse.  
The servants held the horse.  
Mher dismounted. Msrah Melik asked:  
—Where are you from, brave one?  
Mher replied: —I am from Sassoun,  
I am the son of Sanasar.  
—Oh, no! exclaimed Msrah Melik,  
Are you the one living in my land?  
Are you Mher?  
—Yes, I am Mher.  
—Did you come to fight? asked Msrah Melik.  
Why don't you pay the tribute that is due me?  
The land of Sassoun belongs to me.  
We will fight in the morning.  
—We will fight, replied Mher.

3.

In the morning Mher of Sassoun  
Went and faced Msrah Melik.  
Mher of Sassoun and Msrah Melik started to fight.  
The earth was giving way under their feet  
And getting ploughed in furrows.  
Some said:  
—The fighters were like thundering clouds.  
Others said:  
—Mountains crumbled from the quake they caused.  
The earth trembled from their blows;  
With their maces, weighing three hundred liters each,  
[136] They exchanged blow for blow. Again and again  
They fell on each other and exchanged blow for blow.  
For three days and three nights they fought,  
But could not down each other.  
Mher was powerful,  
While Msrah Melik was cunning, crafty.

Msrah Melik realized that he could not overpower Mher.  
He realized that Mher was an *aznavoor*.  
He said: —Mher of Sassoun,  
Come, let us come to terms.  
I thought there was no one stronger  
Than me in the world,  
But neither one of us could down the other.  
I am granting to you all the tribute you owe me.  
Sassoun is no longer a tributary to me;  
With all its lands Sassoun is yours.  
Go back, eat and drink, and flourish;  
Only in time of war  
We will assist each other [as allies].

Msrah Melik added: —When I die I will entrust  
My wife and children to you.  
When you die you will entrust your wife

And children to me.  
People must not say we left orphans behind.  
They cut their finger tip, mingled their blood,  
Sealed the pack, became [blood] brothers.  
But Msrah Melik did not act in good faith.  
He feared Mher. He feigned friendship.

4.

Mher rode back to Sassoun.  
He saw Tzenov Hovan standing at the door;  
Mher greeted him.  
Tzenov Hovan returned his greeting and asked:  
[137] —Mher, lad, did you get our tax reduced?  
—Hovan, what would you say [to this]? replied Mher.  
Msrah Melik is a good man,  
He abolished our tax, and said to me,  
'With all its lands Sassoun is yours.'  
And do you know, Hovan, added Mher,  
Melik and I became [blood] brothers?

Time passed.  
Mher governed Sassoun so well  
That no one dared to violate its borders;  
The bird on its wings could not fly over Sassoun,  
The snake on its belly could not crawl into Sassoun.  
Sassoun flourished under Mher.

5.

Time passed.  
Msrah Melik died.

Upon the death of Msrah Melik,  
His queen, Ismil Khatoun—  
A young and beautiful woman—  
Said to herself: —I need a man who will rule my land  
And keep peace among my princes.  
Why should I not send for Mher,  
Asking him to come, to be my guest  
And share my bed, so that  
I can have a giant offspring from his race?  
My husband was saying to me,  
Ismil, if we do not get an offspring  
From Mher and from his horse,  
Mher's race will destroy us.'

Then what did Melik's wife do?  
[138] She sent two pahlevans to Sassoun.  
To the pahlevans she gave  
Her girdle and veil together with a letter.  
She said to them:  
—Take this letter and give it to Mher;  
Tell him: Ismil Khatoun  
Invites you to visit with her.'

The pahlevans reached Sassoun,  
Took the letter to Mher's house;  
Mher was out, hunting.  
On his return in the evening  
The pahlevans went to him and said:  
—Msrah Khatoun sends you this letter  
With her girdle and veil,  
And invites you to visit with her.  
Mher glanced at the girdle, the veil, and asked:  
—What does this mean?  
Let me see the letter.  
The pahlevans handed the letter to Mher.  
He read what Ismil Khatoun had written:  
—Come, take me.  
I am sending you [my] girdle and veil.  
As you are ruling Sassoun,  
You can rule Msr, too.  
If you do not come  
You will be more like a woman than I am.  
You took an oath with Msrah Melik  
To take care of his wife and children.  
Mher said: —Brave ones,  
A vow in the name of God is sacred to me.  
Come, let us go in,  
Break some bread [with me] before you leave.  
Take my greetings to Msrah Khatoun.  
I will be with her within forty days  
[139] To see what there is to be done.

The pahlevans went into Mher's house,  
Had some food, [then] returned to Msr.  
Mher remained alone.

6.

Mher read the letter again.  
He went to Armaghan: —My wife, he said,  
Ismil Khatoun has sent a letter  
And has asked me to go to Msr. I am going.  
Armaghan said: —Do not go, Mher,  
Why do you need to go?  
Do you want to possess her?  
Has she ever seen you  
To send her girdle and veil to you?  
Does she know whether you are handsome or unsightly?  
Why does she invite you to Msr? She will beguile you.  
Don't go, Mher. She doesn't covet your charm,  
She covets your valour, your virility.  
She has heard, she knows how valourous you are,  
She is asking you to go to her;  
She wants a child from you.  
It is not right, Mher, don't go.  
You are taking her—leaving me [behind].  
Mher said: —My wife, if I do not go,

I will be [considered] a woman like her.  
I have made a vow with Melik,  
What can I do? I must go.  
Mher's wife said: —Don't go.  
Mher said: —I must go.  
She said [again]: —Don't go.  
[140] Mher said: —I am going.  
Mher's wife said then:  
—Mher, I cannot prevail on you,  
But, if you go, I vow that  
You will be a father or brother to me,  
You will not share my bed for forty years.

7.

Mher went to Deghtzoun Dzam's [his mother's] chamber,  
Summoned his kinsmen,  
Summoned his ministers,  
Summoned Vardapets [doctors of the Church], and said to them:  
—Msrah Melik's wife has sent for me;  
I am going. What would you advise?  
Tzenov Hovan said: —Why are you going?  
Melik's wife is cunning,  
She is the wife of our enemy,  
She will beguile you. Don't go.  
You have no son, stay at home,  
God may grant a son to you.  
But the ministers and Vardapets said:  
—Mher, if you want to go,  
We will not say do not go.  
Is it not our wish that you rule  
Not only Msr but other kingdoms, too?  
If Ismil Khatoun has sent for you,  
Why should you not go?  
Her land is yours; go quickly, take over the rule of Msr.

8.

Thirty-nine days were over, one day was left.  
Mher was getting ready to leave Sassoun.  
What did Armaghan do?  
[141] She took a black cover and  
Spread it over Mher's bed-pillow.  
Mher mounted his horse.  
Tzenov Hovan ran to him,  
Clung to the neck of his horse, cried and pleaded:  
—Don't go, don't go,  
That wicked woman is beguiling you.  
Unable to bear this any longer,  
Mher swung his mace toward Tzenov Hovan.  
The swinging mace raised such an air current that  
It knocked Hovan unconscious.  
Mher was alarmed.  
He jumped down from his horse,

And, weeping, massaged Hovan's heart;  
—Hovan, my elder brother, wake up, he said,  
I have taken an oath before God;  
If I do not go, I will die for breaking my vow.  
Hovan sat up and said:  
—Ay, [brother] Mher, now that you are going,  
May desolate roads bloom before you,  
And may no arm of your enemy rise against you.  
Hovan stood up, kissed Mher on his forehead.  
Mher mounted Kourkig Jelaly,  
Took with him Charbahar [Four Spring Seasons] Kamy and rode away.

9.

Mher started in the morning, reached Msr in the evening.  
Msrah Khatoun was sitting at her window;  
She had darkened her eyelashes [with kohl],  
And arranged her side-bangs.  
For the distance of an hour she had the roads  
Covered with carpets and lighted with torches.  
She wanted to arouse in Mher a desire for her.  
[142] Her eyes were pinned to the road,  
When in the distance she saw a rider;  
He looked like a big fort, mounted on a horse,  
Dashing like a hurricane.  
Ismil Khatoun said:  
—That rider can be no one but Mher of Sassoun.  
Mher arrived, drew near, saluted,  
Stopped at her window and said:  
—Ismil Khatoun, say what you have to say.  
—Mher, my man, said Ismil Khatoun,  
Is that the way a guest speaks?  
Dismount, come in, so that I can tell you.  
—No, said Mher, tell me now, at once.  
I have sworn before God [that]  
I will not move my foot from my stirrup;  
Say what you have to say.  
—It is truly said that the people of Sassoun  
Are stubborn, Ismil Khatoun said.  
Your land is not in ruins,  
Sassoun is not hard pressed for fire,  
And you did not come to borrow kindling for fire.  
Dismount, refresh yourself, then go.  
—No, no, my lady, said Mher,  
I will listen to no such talk;  
Just tell me what you want to say.

Seeing that Mher was determined to turn back,  
She said to the servants: —Doom to you!  
Don't you have seven-year-old wine?  
He is turning back; hurry, hurry!  
The attendants brought some seven-year-old wine,  
Gave it to Mher still on his horse. He took the wine.  
As he drank the wine, it went to his head.

Ismil Khatoun ordered the servants: —Hold the horse!  
They held the horse, Mher dismounted.  
She took him to her palace,  
Where she welcomed him.  
[143] —Why did you send for me? asked Mher.  
She said: —Mher, I sent for you to come  
And bring order to our land.  
My seven princes do not submit to my rule.  
Mher said: —Very well; let me have some food now.  
Tomorrow morning summon those princes.  
I will know how to deal with them.

Ismil Khatoun then said to him:  
—Mher, I sent my girdle and veil to you  
Because I want you to share my bed;  
That is why I sent for you.  
—That is impossible, said Mher,  
How can I share your bed?  
You are an unbeliever, I am a Christian.  
—Mher, said Ismil Khatoun,  
I will have you for my husband,  
My Kingdom will be yours,  
You will fight my enemies.  
I love you, Mher.  
You will be mine by your own will.  
You will be mine against your will.

With endearing words and tender love  
Ismil Khatoun intoxicated Mher;  
She honored him, feasted him,  
And served him abundantly with heady wine,  
Until, helpless, Mher yielded  
And went to Ismil's bed.  
Ismil Khatoun then ordered the stablemen:  
—Mate Kourkig Jelaly with the mares.  
The servants mated Kourkig Jelaly with the mares.

Ismil conceived by Mher,  
The mares got in foal through Kourkig Jelaly.

In the morning the seven princes of Msr came to Mher  
[144] And stood at the door of the audience chamber.  
Seeing them, Mher said:  
—Ah, my lords, you have come.  
The seven princes, one by one,  
Stepped back and stood at attention.  
Mher asked: —My lords, [do you know]  
What sort of a man I am?  
They said: —Above the earth we acknowledge God,  
On this earth we acknowledge you.  
The seven princes of Msr bowed before Mher.

Mher then wanted to return to Sassoun,  
But Ismil Khatoun would not let him.  
She kept him always under wine.

When nine months, nine days, nine hours were completed,  
A son was born to Ismil Khatoun.  
To carry on her husband's name,  
She named the child Msrah Melik.

10.

Ismil kept Mher's mind befogged by wine for seven years.  
One day as he was returning from outside,  
He stopped at the door when he heard a voice.  
Msrah Khatoun was playing with her son  
And mirthfully saying:  
—Your mother would die for you, Melik,  
May you rebuild the Msr homeland  
And destroy the Armenian homeland.  
Hearing these words,  
Mher sobered and said to himself:  
—I came here and extinguished the flame of Armenia  
And rekindled the flame of Msr!  
Mher went in and asked:  
—Ismil, what are you saying to that child?

[145] He is hardly out of his swaddling clothes,  
And you are teaching him to be wicked.  
Is he going to extinguish the flame of Sassoun  
When he grows?

Ismil said:  
—Yes. [That is why] I am rejoicing over my son.  
When he grows, he will rule the whole world.  
Mher said:  
—Do you presume that  
The son you have will destroy Sassoun?  
Are you going to destroy my race and rebuild Msr?  
I swear I will not come near you again,  
I swear I will not stay in Msr,  
I will return to Sassoun.  
Melik's wife said:  
—I wanted to bear a son,  
I wanted an heir to the throne of Msr.  
I wanted to keep the flame of Msr alive.  
I kept you under wine for seven years;  
You may go now or you may stay.  
Hearing this, Mher sobered.  
As he sobered, he said to himself:  
—I will not stay here another day.  
What shall I tell to Armaghan and Hovan?  
How right my wife, Armaghan, was!  
She said to me, 'Do not go.'  
But I did not listen to her.  
Bemoaning his fate, Mher cursed himself:  
—My eyes should have been struck blind that  
I came here and for seven years  
I watered and kept green a stranger's field,  
While my own field went dry. Woe to me! What did I do?

I extinguished the flame of Armenia,  
[146] Rekindled the flame of Msr.  
Mher silently stole away from Msr, and,  
Crushed and remorseful,  
He returned to his home Sassoun.

11.

They took the good news to Armaghan:  
—Mher has returned.  
Armaghan spread ashes over the palace courtyard  
And closed the gates.  
Mher found every entrance barred,  
And every door walled.  
He asked: —Why have they closed the doors  
And will not let me enter my house?  
Armaghan replied:  
—Because you are not my husband.  
You left me and went to Msr;  
Do not come to me.  
Mher pleaded: —Open the gate!  
Armaghan replied: —Mher, when you left me,  
I vowed that I would not let you come  
To my bed for forty years.  
You are my father, my brother, [not my husband].  
You went and rebuilt the [*odchakh*] House of Msr  
And wrecked the House of Sassoun.  
To atone for your sin,  
You must do penance for forty years;  
Then you will be allowed to come to my bed.  
Mher was stunned. He said:  
—After forty years it will be too late.  
Melik [the boy] will grow up to full manhood.  
Mher tried to persuade his wife to relent.  
Armaghan would not relent.

147.

They took the news to Tzenov Hovan:  
—Mher is back from Msr.  
Hovan went to Armaghan and said:  
—Armaghan, Mher came back today;  
Come, remove the black cover [from his bed-pillow].  
She removed the black cover and said:  
—Hovan, my elder brother,  
I know Mher has come back;  
He was beguiled by that wicked [woman].  
He took with him silver, brought back copper.  
I cannot break my vow.  
—Sister mine, said Tzenov Hovan,  
We will summon Vardapets  
And a few elders to hold council  
And release you from your vow.



They summoned and assembled Vardapets and elders.  
These Vardapets and elders  
Sat in a council [discussed the law].  
They said: —After all, no harm has been done;  
He is human—a man prone to sin.  
Let us admit he went away, had an affair of love;  
But he is back now.  
Armaghan, how many years have you taken your oath for?  
—For forty years, replied Armaghan.  
The Vardapets and elders then said:  
—Blessed one, the law rests in the hands of Vardapets;  
Forty years we will reduce to forty months,  
Forty months we will reduce to forty weeks,  
Forty weeks we will reduce to forty days, and  
Forty days we will reduce to forty hours.  
A waggish priest then added:  
—Forty hours we will reduce to this instant.  
[148] A Vardapet then offered a prayer  
And said: May God absolve you,  
Go now, and, with mutual assent,  
Live together as man and wife.

Then Mher said: —They are right, my lady,  
Let me come to your bed.  
God may grant us a son  
To keep the light of Armenia burning.  
Armaghan opened the door and said:  
—As it is, Man is always at the head,  
Woman is always at the foot [bottom] ,  
She cannot keep the door closed to man.  
I am opening the door now; come in;  
God will grant us a son,  
But we will be breaking a vow. We both will die.  
Our son will be left an orphan, on the mat.  
Mher said: —May God grant us a son [so that]  
He will overpower Melik.  
The light of Sassoun shall not be extinguished.  
A wolf cannot devour a lamb of God.  
We are of this earth, destined to die.  
But when we die, our son will live in our stead.  
He will keep our memory alive, [and]  
The name of our House will not perish.  
Armaghan said:  
—We will break a vow. The onus is on you.  
They reduced forty years to forty months,  
Forty months to forty weeks,  
Forty weeks to forty days, and  
Forty days to forty hours.  
When the forty hours came to an end,  
[149] Armaghan and Mher came together [as man and wife];  
Mher's wife, Armaghan, conceived.

In the meanwhile  
Mher went to the Mount of Sassoun.

There he had a park planted and a pavilion built.  
He stocked the park with all the beasts and birds  
Of God's creation; walled the park  
And named it Dzovasar [Mountain overlooking the sea].  
At a distance of two hours from Dzovasar  
He built a beautiful monastery;  
Named it the High Madonna of Marout.  
He manned the monastery with priests, Vardapets,  
And gave asylum to the destitute,  
The blind and the lame.  
Completing his work, he returned to Sassoun.

When nine months, nine days,  
And nine hours were fulfilled,  
A son was born to Armaghan.  
They baptized the child, named him David.  
When they brought the child home,  
Mher and Armaghan, forsworn, died.

Mher's mother, Karsoun Jewgh Dzam Degtzoun,  
Went into mourning upon Mher's death.  
She confined herself in a room behind seven doors  
Where no sun would shine on her head,  
No light would enter until the child would grow  
And take Mher's place.

Sassoun mourned Mher.  
David was left an orphan.

**(Continued on Next Page)**

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# David of Sassoun

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[Page 153]

## *David of Sassoun*

### Part I

#### *David's Fight against Msrah Melik*

1.

[154] Again, we pray for mercy  
on Deghtzoun Jewgh Dzam  
—Forty mercies.

Again, we pray for mercy  
on Kerry Toros  
—Forty mercies.

Again, we pray for mercy  
on Tzenov Hovan  
—Forty mercies.

Again, we pray for mercy  
on the Old Widow, the owner of a patch of land  
—Forty mercies.

Again, we will not pray for mercy  
On Ch'm'shkig Sultan  
—No mercy for her.

Again, we will not pray for mercy  
On Msrah Melik  
—No mercy for him.

Again, we pray for mercy  
On Ismil Khatoun  
—Forty mercies.

Again, we pray for mercy  
On Khantout Khanum  
—Forty mercies.

Again, we pray for mercy  
On *Tarlan* [Stalwart] David  
—A thousand mercies.

[155]

## The Child David in Msr

2.

David was left an orphan.  
His uncles came together  
[To decide on what to do with the child].  
Tzenov Hovan asked:  
—Vergo, will you take David, or shall I take him?  
Vergo said: —No, I have my own son;  
You take him and care for him.  
Tzenov Hovan took David,  
Adopted him as his foster-child.  
They took the child  
To all the wet-nurses in Sassoun,  
The child would not take the breast of anyone.

Tzenov Hovan assembled the townsmen of Sassoun;  
He said: —The child will die;  
What shall we do?  
We cannot give him the proper care.  
The Sassounites said:  
—Mher lived [with a woman] in Msr for seven years.  
She is a nursing mother;  
Send David to her,  
She will nurse him, take care of him for Mher's sake.  
He will thrive there.  
If he is kept here, he will die.  
He takes no one's breast.

[156]

3.

Hovan asked: —But who will take him to Msr?  
They said: —Put him on Kourkig Jelaly's saddle,  
Tie him well;  
Prod Kourkig with a stick,  
He will take the child to Msr.

Tzenov Hovan led Kourkig Jelaly out of his stall;  
They curried him,  
Swaddled David and tied him to Kourkig's back.  
Then Hovan entreated [the horse]:  
[*Chanting*:]  
—Kourkig Jelaly, I beg of you,  
Don't drop my child into a river,  
Don't hit my child against a rock,  
Don't ride through a thicket.  
Take him to Msr,  
Deliver him securely to Ismil Khatoun.  
Kourkig Jelaly, I entrust to you  
Our light of Sassoun.  
Don't hit him against rocks,

Don't drop him among thickets,  
Deliver him safely—our Light of Sassoun.

4.

Kourkig Jelaly took David  
And soared through the sky.  
Msrah Melik's mother, sitting at her window,  
Saw sparks shooting from the earth,  
And a cloud of dust gathering over the fields.  
Msrah Melik said:  
—That is not a thunder-cloud.  
Those sparks are flying from Kourkig Jelaly's hoofs.  
Ismil Khatoun ordered:  
—Gate men, throw the gates open,  
[157] A horse is coming to our door.  
The gate men opened the gates;  
And there stood Kourkig Jelaly  
With something on his back.  
—Msrah Melik, called Ismil Khatoun,  
Take that bundle down and bring it to me.

Msrah Melik went to Kourkig Jelaly;  
The horse bent down his head,  
Melik saw a bundle on his back.  
He took it down,  
Handed it to Ismil Khatoun.  
She unwrapped the bundle and saw the child, David,  
With a letter lying at his side.  
In the letter Tzenov Hovan wrote:  
—Sister-in-law, favorite of my brother,  
A son was born to Mher after his return to Sassoun.  
Mher and his wife died; the child is an orphan.  
For Mher's sake, take the child and nurse him  
So that he may live — When he is grown,  
I will take him and care for him.

The queen of Msr said to herself:  
—Mher was good to me,  
I will raise this child for his sake.  
There is still milk in my breast,  
I will wean my own son [to nurse this child].  
I will raise him, keep him here.  
He and Melik will be brothers,  
Live like brothers;  
They will rule Msr, conquer the world.  
After he is raised here,  
Will he go to Sassoun? I wonder!

[158]

5.

Msrah Melik thought to himself:  
[We must keep Kourkig Jelaly.]

He called: —Boys, close the outer gates,  
Kourkig Jelaly has fallen into our hands,  
Let us hold him, keep him.  
They closed the gates.  
The hostlers surrounded the horse,  
Tried to seize him.  
Kourkig Jelaly said [to himself]:  
—O God, how shall I escape from here?  
He paced back and forth inside the high walls;  
Then he exhorted: —O Lord God,  
I am going to scale that wall,  
I will either escape or be captured.  
Kourkig Jelaly then gathered strength,  
Broke through the hostlers.  
Leaped over the wall forty kazes high,  
And dashed away.  
Msrah Melik shouted:  
—Woe! Kourkig Jelaly is gone.

6.

The horse escaped,  
Ran day and night until he reached Sassoun.  
Tzenov Hovan was watching the road impatiently.  
Toward evening, suddenly he saw  
A cloud of dust rising between earth and sky.  
It was Kourkig Jelaly  
Coming with nothing on his back.  
As he drew near,  
Tzenov Hovan went to him and asked:  
—I would die for you, Kourkig Jelaly;  
Over what mountain did you drop David?  
Over what rock, in which thicket did you drop him?  
[159] Which wolf, which beast did devour him,  
My *tarlan* David?  
Kourkig said:  
—I did not drop him over a mountain or into a dale,  
Neither a wolf nor a beast devoured him.  
I took him to Msr, delivered him to Ismil Khatoun.  
But I barely escaped.  
They closed the outer gates, surrounded me  
And tried to seize me.  
I leaped a wall forty kazes high and ran away.  
Tzenov Hovan kissed the horse on the forehead and said:  
—The wrath of God on the house and offspring of anyone  
Who discloses the whereabouts of this horse!  
He led Kourkig Jelaly behind seven doors,  
Locked all the doors, banked them with earth,  
And kept serving him with grain and water  
Through the skylight.

7.

Ismil Khatoun rejoiced over David.  
She gave her breast to him;  
David took the breast, suckled for a time.  
One day he refused to take her milk;  
She would lay his head on one breast,  
David would turn his head away;  
She would lay his head on the other breast,  
Again he would turn his head away;  
For three days and nights David took no milk.  
Ismil Khatoun wept; she was dismayed  
And did not know what to do with him.  
She called Msrah Melik and asked:  
—This child has not taken my breast  
For three days and nights,  
What shall we do with him?  
Msrah Melik said:  
—He is stubborn like his race, Mother,  
[160] He will bring us grief.  
He is an Armenian, we are Arabs,  
Don't give him your breast.  
Ismil Khatoun said: —If he does not take my breast,  
He will die.  
We will be humiliated before his family.  
We cannot neglect him, he is our responsibility.  
—Doom to you! said Melik.  
His father's household has great stores of provisions.  
Don't they have honey, don't they have butter,  
And delicious things?  
Send Batmanah Bougheh to Mher's house [in Sassoun]  
To bring a camel-load of honey,  
A camel-load of butter.  
Then make butter-honey, feed the child with it.  
Ismil Khatoun sent Batmanah Bougheh  
To get honey and butter.  
Tzenov Hovan gave him honey and butter  
And other things the child could eat—  
He gave them all to Batmanah Bougheh.  
Batmanah Bougheh brought a load of honey,  
A load of butter,  
And laid them before Ismil Khatoun.  
Seeing this, Msrah Melik said [to his mother]:  
—Now, where could you find anything as good as this?  
Give it to him, let him eat and grow.  
Ismil Khatoun fed David with butter and honey.  
While other children grew by the year,  
David grew by the day.  
Ismil Khatoun was taking good care of David.  
She was saying: —David will be Melik's companion;  
Together they will rule the world.  
David was so strong that he burst his swaddle straps.  
Ismil Khatoun swathed him with chains;  
David was so strong that he shattered the chains.  
[161] She tried everything, nothing could withstand his strength.  
She spun the waste of carded wool,

Wove it into elastic bands;  
As David inhaled, the bands stretched;  
As he exhaled, the bands contracted.

8.

Knowing that Mher was dead,  
Msrah Melik issued a call to arms,  
Gathered an army and marched on Sassoun.  
He put to the sword  
And decimated the people of Sassoun,  
Levied a huge indemnity,  
Drove the cattle and sheep away,  
Pillaged the land and laid it waste.  
He reduced Sassoun to a vassal state,  
Made prisoners of Hovan and Vergo,  
And took them to Msr.

Time passed.  
Vergo and Hovan could not earn a livelihood in Msr.  
Tzenov Hovan said to Melik:  
—Grant us leave to return to our land.  
Melik released them. They went to Sassoun.

Vergo became the governor of Sassoun;  
Msrah Melik did not permit David to leave,  
And gave orders  
To keep him confined in a room.  
In the morning David awoke, found his door locked.  
He kicked the door and knocked it off its frame;  
He came out;  
In a park he saw boys playing seesaw.  
David bent a tall plane tree,  
Held its top on the ground and said [to the boys] :  
—Come, have a ride, play horseback.  
[162] The boys came and mounted the tree.  
David held the tree down for a long, long while;  
When his hands became too tired, he shouted:  
—Get off, get off, my hands are tired.  
But the boys paid no attention; they did not get off.  
Then David let the treetop go;  
All the boys fell down,  
Some died, some had their skulls cracked.  
They were the sons of prominent people.  
Their fathers went to Melik,  
Protested and said to him:  
—O King, send that foolhardy boy away;  
If you do not, we will leave your land.

9.

Melik was furious;  
He had David locked in a dark room  
So that he could not see a ray of sunlight.  
He appointed a master [tutor] to discipline him.



To the men who took food to David, Melik said:  
—When you take him meat, take the bone out of the meat;  
When you take him fruit, take the pit out of the fruit.  
One day the guards so annoyed the servant  
Carrying the food that  
He said to himself: —Wait,  
Today when I take the food to David,  
I will not take the bones out of the meat.  
He will eat the meat, take the bone,  
Come out and kill you with it.  
He took the food to David.  
While he was eating, David sank his teeth into the meat  
And found he could not chew the bone;  
He threw the bone and broke a hole through the skylight.  
Sunbeams streamed through the hole.  
David said: —What is this falling into my room?  
He tried to catch the beam of light,  
[163] Fell on the floor, got up again,  
Tried it again, again, and again,  
Until he was drenched with sweat.

His master who was teaching him,  
Entered the room  
And saw David struggling, rising, falling on the floor.  
He said: —David, I would die for you,  
Why are you hitting the floor?  
David replied: —This thing has entered my room,  
And will not get out.  
The master said: —Just shut your eyes.  
David shut his eyes;  
With a handkerchief the master plugged the hole,  
The sunbeam disappeared. Then David said:  
—I struggled so hard, but I could not chase it out.  
Are you stronger than I?  
The master said: —My soul, my pet,  
That was not a man, it was a sunbeam.  
David then said: —If there is sun outside,  
Why have you imprisoned me in this room?  
The master replied: —My soul, my pet,  
There is sun, there is day, there is night.  
David asked: —Then why don't you let me out?  
The master replied: —I will go and ask the king.  
The master went to the king and said: —Long live the King.  
David wants to leave his room,  
He wants to see the sunlight.  
The king said: —Take him out for a walk.

10.

The master came, took David's arm and  
Led him out of the room. They walked through the city.  
David asked about everything he saw—  
Cattle, buffalo, and horses;  
He asked about everything,

[164] What is this, what is that?  
The master answered him: —This is this, that is that.  
They came out of the city.  
David saw all the city-folk gathered in a field;  
He said: —Let us go there.  
The master said: —I would die for you,  
There is nothing for you to see; let us go this way.  
He said: —No, take me there.  
The master said again:  
—There is nothing for us to see.  
—Will you take me or not? asked David.  
As the master said —No!  
David gave a twist to his master's ear.  
The master said: —Let us go.  
They went to the far end of the *maidan* [gaming field].  
There they stood. As they were watching,  
David saw something flying in the sky—  
He saw a javelin coming toward them.  
It was a javelin thrown by Melik.  
David caught the javelin and threw it back;  
The javelin flew over Melik's head and ten-kaz beyond.  
Melik asked: —Ah, ha!  
Who is the pahlevan that outdistanced me?  
They went, they saw, they came, and said:  
—Long live the King, it was David.  
Melik ordered: —Bring him here, I will cut his head off.  
The vizier and deputies fell on their knees,  
Kissed Melik's hand and feet,  
And said: —Long live the King, David is a child,  
Who is he that you should behead?  
The vizier sent his men to tell the master:  
—Doom to you! Do not bring him here again.  
The master said: —Doom to you!  
Do you think I brought him of my own accord?  
He dragged me by the ear and forced me  
[165] To bring him here.  
They said to him: —Take him away, take him away.  
The master took David back to his room.

11.

When Melik returned home that evening,  
David asked Ismil Khatoun:  
—Mother mine, where does Msrah Melik go all day?  
She said: —Mother would die for you!  
He goes to his sporting grounds and returns at night;  
He plays ball.  
—But why doesn't he take me with him  
So that I also can gain a bit more knowledge?  
I am left alone at home and getting impatient;  
I have no one to play with;  
Let him take me to the sporting field, too.  
His mother said: —I would die for you,  
The horses will trample you to pieces.

We have nursed you, cared for you to this day,  
We will be in disgrace [if any harm comes to you].  
David cried and said:  
—Mother, I will stand aside.  
Ismil Khatoun said: —Melik, please,  
Take David with you in the morning;  
Let him join the ball game and learn how to play.  
Msrah Melik said:  
—David, you are too young, you cannot play with us.  
David said: —I am coming with you.  
Ismil Khatoun said: —Melik, I beg you,  
Take David along. Don't you see how he is crying?  
—Mother, Melik said,  
He is the child of a hard-headed race,  
I am afraid he will bring disaster on us.  
Ismil argued with him and said:  
[166] —No, you [must] take him;  
Take him, set him at a high place,  
Let him watch the game;  
Don't let him come down and get under the horses' hoofs.  
Msrah Melik said:  
—If I do not take him with me, people will say,  
Melik pays no attention to David because he is an orphan.  
Very well, Mother, I will take him with me in the morning.

12.

In the morning Msrah Melik mounted his horse,  
Took David with him.  
He did not want to keep the boy near him.  
He sent him to a high hilltop.  
Two pahlevans took him,  
Bound his hands and feet,  
Set him on top of a high hill,  
And stayed with him as guards.  
With his soldiers, ministers, and pahlevans  
Melik descended to Lerra Dasht  
And joined in games with the pahlevans.  
From the place where David was,  
One could hardly see Lerra Dasht.

David remained set there till noon.  
He looked and looked but could not see anything.  
He could not understand why he was kept there.  
He was not happy.  
Turning to his guards, he said:  
—Pahlevans, untie my hands.  
Pahlevans said:  
—It is the king's order. We must hold you here  
So that you will not go down  
And get under the horses' hoofs.  
[167]  
David, annoyed, quietly bestirred himself,  
And broke the ropes.

The two pahlevans hung onto him  
But could not hold him down.  
David dragged them face downward  
All the way home.  
At home he lay down on the floor.  
Ismil Khatoun asked David:  
—Why are you angry, why did you come back?  
David said: —Msrah Melik took me,  
Set me on top of a high hill,  
Went down to the field, and joined in the games.  
As I could see nothing, I came home.

In the evening Melik said to his pahlevans:  
—Aim your balls to hit and kill David.  
One after the other, the pahlevans and Melik  
Aimed their balls and hit the spot  
Where David would be.  
But David was not there;  
They left, returned home.

When Msrah Melik entered the room,  
Ismil Khatoun did not rise to greet him.  
Msrah Melik asked:  
—Why are you angry? Why are you sitting there?  
Why didn't you rise and greet me?  
His mother replied:  
—Why didn't you take David to the ball-field  
So that he could watch [the games]?  
Melik said: —Mother, he does not listen to me.  
If a ball hit him, he would be killed.  
Then people would say, Melik killed him  
Because he begrudged the food the boy ate.  
I would be put to shame before my people.  
I took him with me; he ran away, came home.  
In the evening they placed food before David.  
[168] He was angry. They coaxed him, he would not eat.  
Ismil Khatoun persisted, asking Melik again:  
—Msrah Melik, my son,  
Take him along in the morning and keep him near you.  
Melik said: —Very well, Mother,  
I will take him along tomorrow and keep him near me.

13.

The following morning,  
As the horsemen of the city of Msr assembled,  
Msrah Melik mounted his horse,  
Took David,  
And with his dignitaries,  
Warriors, pahlevans, rode to the field  
For a tournament of mace-throwing.  
They put David near the ball-field,  
One *ardachap* [patch of land] away.  
Msrah Melik said: —David,

You stay here and watch the game.  
Do you see that mace?  
It is a wicked thing, very wicked.  
If it hits a man, it will kill him.  
Don't come near us, don't get into our game.  
David said: —Yes, Brother, I will do as you say.

Melik at the ball-field  
Was throwing the mace with his companions,  
While David, sitting nearby, was playing with dust,  
Pouring it on his toes and rolling in it.  
The pahlevans were familiar with the game—  
Having played it before.  
They played without injuring anyone.  
[169]  
In this way they kept throwing their maces till midday.  
David, sitting at his place, kept watching  
Until it was Melik's turn to throw the mace.  
Melik, at his turn, mounted his horse and  
Rode into the midst of the soldiers.  
They all gathered to watch him.  
Melik held a huge mace  
That weighed three hundred sixty-six liters.  
He was limbering up,  
Swinging the mace right and left.  
As he tossed it up sparks flew from it.

As Melik hit the ground with his mace,  
The earth split open like furrows cut in by ox carts.  
Seeing that it was Melik's turn,  
David crawled into a deep furrow.  
He wore a skull cap with a hole.  
Sitting in the trench,  
David was measuring dust with his cap,  
Saying: —This is one.  
He kept measuring and saying: —This is one;  
He did not know how to say 'two.'  
Melik shouted: —David, get out [of that trench],  
I am going to throw my mace.  
He called three times.  
David pretended he did not hear him.  
Melik said: —Pahlevans, Gagan, Aslan,  
Go, grab his feet and drag him out.

Gagan, Aslan, and five pahlevans  
Went to David, grabbed his feet,  
Tried to drag him out, but could not budge him.  
David kept saying: —This is one, this is one.  
Again they tried, but could not budge him.  
David was like a tree that could not be uprooted.

[170] The players were thrown into confusion,  
Their game was disrupted.  
Msrah Melik, angered, shouted:

—Throw your maces; kill him.  
The players threw their maces;  
David caught one with his right hand,  
Hurled it into the air,  
He caught another one with his left hand,  
Hurled it into the air.  
Seeing this feat, Msrah Melik was astonished.  
He said: —Stand aside!  
I am going to throw my mace.  
I told my mother that I didn't want to bring him here.  
I know his temperament;  
Someday he will inflict harm upon me;  
It is better that I hit him, kill him now.  
I know he will be my doom. Stand aside.  
David heard what Melik said. He shouted back:  
—Hurl, hurl your mace, Melik, let it come.  
Don't let me know, don't let me hear,  
That you are wavering.  
[God did not ordain  
That my race shall take to flight before the men of Msr,  
Nor David himself shall take to flight  
Before Melik of Msr.]  
Hearing these words of David, Melik said:  
—'Dust you were, to dust you will return,'  
And hurled his mace.

As David watched, it seemed to him that  
A millstone was speeding to crash over his head.  
He raised his arm and caught the mace,  
Poised it in his hand and said: —Thousand regrets!  
This mace is a bit light;  
If forty *pouts* of lead  
[171] Were melted and poured over it,  
It would then suit David's strength.  
Seeing this, Melik scowled, raised his eyebrows.  
His companions, deriding him, said:  
—Melik, Melik, you were saying that 'I am strong,'  
David is still a boy,  
But did you see how he caught your mace?  
Melik said: —Woe to me!  
How can it be that I throw my mace and fail to hit David?  
He will take my kingdom away.  
[While Melik was saying this,]  
David ran his hands over Melik's mace  
And hid it under his knees.

Gagan, Aslan and many pahlevans  
Mounted their horses and rushed to David.  
They looked for the mace throughout the field,  
But could not find it.  
David then took out the mace,  
Poised it, rolled it in his hand, shouted:  
— Gourz, sachar gourz! [Mace, third mace!]  
And hurled it. As he hurled it,

The mace hit and killed Gagan, Aslan,  
And five other pahlevans.

The other men said: —Melik,  
We came here for a pastime.  
If you knew that David was a foolhardy,  
Why did you bring him to kill these men?  
How shall we take these dead men to the city?  
People will ask us:  
—Did you go to the sports field  
To have fun or to slaughter men?  
[172] Melik became furious, he drew his sword,  
Ran after David to cut his throat.  
He was shouting: —I will kill that orphan whelp.  
Pahlevans then rushed to him and said:  
—Fie, fie, Melik, are you going to kill David?  
One said: —He is an orphan to be pitied;  
Another one said: —Let him alone;  
[Others said:]  
—He is a child, he cannot think.  
—Melik, don't kill him. People will say,  
'Melik killed an orphan  
Because of the food he had to give him.'  
—He could not throw your mace,  
By the will of God the angel hurled your mace.  
Many others said: —He is like Mher;  
David has the strength of his father.  
They did not let Melik kill David.

David ran all the way home  
And threw himself on Ismil Khatoun's lap.  
Ismil Khatoun asked: —What has happened?  
David said: —Mother, Melik will kill me;  
Any time he will come and cut my throat.  
Ismil Khatoun asked: —Why should he cut your throat?  
David told her what had happened.

14.

When Melik came home in the evening,  
Msrah Khatoun asked:  
—Msrah Melik, why are you silent,  
Why are you hanging your face?  
Melik replied: —Why should I talk?  
Today David put me to shame before people.  
—What did he do, asked his mother?  
[173] —He caught my mace when I hurled it.  
Ismil said: —That is nothing [to get angry about].  
Melik then became very angry with his mother, too.  
He seized David's arm and shouted:  
—Why did you catch my mace?  
—Why shouldn't I catch it? said David.  
I am not less of a man than you are.  
I am going to throw mace with you, too.

Melik resented David.  
He raised his arm and said:  
—Mother, I am going to kill David.  
Ismil rushed to Melik and said:  
—Are you mad, son?  
—Mother, said Melik, he who caught my mace today  
Will seize my land and throne tomorrow.  
Ismil said: —Mother would die for you, son;  
David is your strength, your girdle-sword.  
David's father was your father. He was a great pahlevan.  
Soon David also will become a pahlevan.  
You will help support each other.  
—Mother, said Msrah Melik,  
People hit by my mace, die.  
David caught my mace and did not die.  
No, Mother, I will not listen to you,  
I am going to cut his throat.

15.

Melik summoned the ministers to the palace.  
He asked them: —What do you advise?  
That boy, David, has started throwing my mace,  
He is killing my men.  
A fair-minded man spoke:  
—Long live the King!

[174] David cannot think, he is a child, liquid-brained.  
—No, said Melik, he knows more than you and I.  
I am going to kill him.  
The man spoke again: —Long may the King live!  
Will you put him to a test?  
If he does not prove a child,  
Cut off my head as well as his.  
—What will be the test? Melik asked.  
The man replied: —Have a pan of gold  
And a pan of burning coals,  
Place David between the two pans;  
If he reaches for the fire,  
He is a child, he has no sense;  
If he reaches for gold,  
Cut off his head.

They brought David in and placed before him  
A pan of gold and a pan of burning coals,  
And said to him: —David, pick the one you like.  
David reached for the gold, [but]  
An angel held his hand, turned it toward the burning coal.  
As he touched the burning coal,  
It stuck fast to his finger;  
He put his finger in his mouth and burned his tongue.  
The child screamed and wept.  
They took the burning coal out of his mouth.  
Ismil Khatoun took David in her arms and wept;



David kept crying.  
Ismil then said: —Melik, son,  
You see now that it will be a sin to kill this child.  
You were saying he did that because he is wicked,  
But did you see how naive he is?  
He did not know; he put his hand into the fire,  
Put the fire in his mouth, burnt his tongue  
Became a lisper.  
Then the fair-minded man asked:  
—May the King live long!  
Did I speak the truth or not?  
Melik said: —Yes, you spoke the truth.  
He is ignorant; he has no sense.

**(Continued on Next Page)**

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# David of Sassoun

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## *David of Sassoun*

### Part I

#### *David's Fight against Msrah Melik*

(Continued from Previous Page [175])

16.

David went out [for a walk],  
Stopped at the door of Melik's armoury.  
Seeing the door open,  
He walked down the steps, went into the armour room  
Where he saw Melik's big mace.  
David said to himself: —What a fine plaything!  
He lifted the mace and threw it down on the floor;  
It made a thunderous noise, aroused the city,  
And frightened men, women, and children.

The thunderous noise, Msrah Melik heard, quaked the city.  
He surmised and said: —That was the thunder of my mace.  
Go, see who did it, what happened to the city?  
The vizier knew that it was David.  
He ran to the armoury and stood at the door.  
[David threw down the mace again;]  
It made another thunderous noise.  
The vizier shouted:  
—David, David, doom to you,  
What are you doing there? Come up, quick!  
David came up and closed the door.  
The vizier said: —David, hurry, go to Ismil Khatoun.  
If you do not go, Msrah Melik will come  
And cut your head off.  
David went away.  
[176] Msrah Melik came in great haste,  
Stood at the door and shouted: —Who is there?  
The vizier said: —I do not know, I found the door open.  
The vizier lied. He did not tell who it was [he saw there].  
—It could not be anyone but David, said Melik,  
No one but David could lift my mace.  
Msrah Melik looked for David throughout the city,  
But could not find him.  
He went home and found David asleep at the Koursy [brazier].

Msrah Melik took the cord off his bow  
And started to strangle David.  
Just then his mother walked in, held his hand  
And asked: —What are you doing, Melik?  
—I am going to strangle David, he said,  
He has been trifling with my mace  
And causing a commotion in the city.  
His mother uncovered her breast,  
Stood before Melik and said: —If you kill David,  
May the milk of this breast be *haram* [forbidden] to you.  
Melik said: —Mother, David is a snake-brat,  
Any harm that comes to me, will come from him.

17.

Melik and his mother then quarreled over David.  
The vizier took David by the hand  
And went to Ismil Khatoun.  
He said: —My Queen,  
Why don't you send David to his own people?  
Why don't you send him to Sassoun?  
Someday Melik will kill the boy.  
[177] Give him food [and the things he needs],  
And send him back to Sassoun.  
He has stayed in our land long enough.

Ismil Khatoun asked: —David, my son,  
Will you go to your uncles in Sassoun, if I send you?  
—Do I have uncles? asked David. Why should I not go?  
Where do my uncles live, Mother?  
—They live in Sassoun, she replied.  
—What are their names?  
—Their names? . . . She said:  
One is Tzenov Hovan,  
The other one, Vergo.  
—O strike you blind! Mother,  
Why didn't you tell this sooner?  
Hurry then, he said, pack ten pairs of socks,  
Ten pairs of sandals, and food for ten days;  
I will start for Sassoun.  
Ismil Khatoun packed ten pairs of socks,  
Ten pairs of sandals, and food for ten days,  
Gave her blessing to David, and said  
—Go, my son, go to Sassoun, to your uncles.  
God be with you.

Msrah Melik then raised his sword and said:  
—David must pass beneath my sword  
Before I let him go to his land.  
David said:  
—Is he doing this, so that when I grow  
I shall not draw my sword against him, [and]  
Not strike him back when he strikes me with his sword?  
If a thousand Meliks like him would die,

Their death to me would mean the loss of a *lachag* [head-covering].  
[178] I would pass beneath a *lachag*,  
But I would not pass beneath his sword.  
Let him do whatever he can.

The vizier held David by the arm  
To force him to pass beneath Melik's sword.  
David stiffened, stood stock-still;  
He would not move, he would not pass beneath the sword.  
The vizier then grabbed and twisted David's upper arm,  
Dragging him to pass beneath the sword.  
David did not pass beneath the sword,  
He sidled the sword.  
[And as he sidled], his little finger brushed a stone  
And crushed it. Sparks flew from the stone.

Msrah Melik became alarmed  
When he saw this. He said:  
—If David is like this when he is young,  
What will he be like when he grows up?

18.

Melik summoned two pahlevans,  
Bougha of Batman and Charbahar Kamy,  
And said to them:  
—Take David beyond seven mountains,  
To Batman Bridge and kill him.  
David was wearing a vest.  
Melik said to the pahlevans:  
—Kill David, dip his vest  
In his blood and bring it to me.  
Bring to me also a jug-full of his blood;  
I will drink it to soothe my heart.  
The pahlevans prepared to leave.  
Ismil Khatoun knew that  
They were going to take David to Sassoun.  
She packed for him food for ten days,  
[179] David's fight against Msrah Melik  
Ten pairs of socks and ten pairs of sandals.  
David kissed Ismil's hand,  
Bade her farewell and left with the pahlevans—  
While they are on their way,  
Let us tell about Kerry Toros.

19.

After the death of Mher,  
Sassoun went into mourning for seven years.  
At the end of seven years  
The dignitaries, priests, and people  
Gathered and came to Kerry Toros.  
The Sassounites said:  
—Ay, Kerry Toros, our sons have aged,  
Our daughters are grown old.

If you know that seven more years of mourning  
Will bring Mher back to life,  
We will mourn him for seven more years.

Kerry Toros said to his people:  
—Marry off your sons and daughters,  
Nothing will come out of mourning.  
They brought wine, set it up to drink;  
They brought food, set it up to eat.  
Kerry Toros asked the priest:  
—Father, say a prayer for Mher's soul.  
The priest said a prayer.  
They filled the goblets with wine  
And gave one to Kerry Toros—to drink.  
Kerry Toros held the goblet in his hand;  
He stood lost in thought.  
He would not drink, nor would he hand the goblet back.  
Khor Manoug then said: —Kerry Toros,  
If you are going to drink, drink; if you are not,  
Allow these people to leave.  
A son of Kerry Toros, too, said to his father:  
[180] —Abbo, these Sassounites are foolhardy,  
They will rail at you;  
Either drink or put the goblet down, so that they may go.  
Toros rebuked his son:  
—Hey, you son of a dog, shall I sit and feast here  
While Msrah Melik holds David in bondage?  
Ah, shame on us!  
By the Bread and Wine and the Eternal Lord,  
I will not put this wine to my lips  
Until I have that orphan boy back.  
He dismissed the men. They left.

20.

A few Sassounite families, living in Msr,  
Heard rumors that  
David of Sassoun was to be killed.  
They came together,  
Wrote a letter to Kerry Toros.  
The letter read:  
—Kerry Toros,  
Lather your head, shave it here;  
Before they inflict harm upon David,  
You may save him  
And take him back to Sassoun.  
They gave the letter to a young lad and told him:  
—Mount your horse, ride to Sassoun,  
Give this letter to Kerry Toros.  
If you reach there in the evening,  
Tell him to start out the same evening.  
If you reach there in the morning,  
Tell him to start out the same morning.  
The lad took the short way and dashed to Sassoun.

[181]

21.

The lad, sent by the weavers,  
Reached Sassoun that night.  
He asked: —Where is Kerry Toros?

They took him to Kerry Toros;  
The boy greeted him;  
Kerry Toros returned the greeting;  
The lad took out the letter from his vest pocket.  
[Gave it to him]  
Kerry Toros read the letter.  
—My wife, he called, bring out six-footed Lazky [a mythical horse]  
Look after the lad until I return.

Kerry Toros mounted his horse the same night,  
Left Sassoun, and reached Msr at daybreak.

Msr Melik was sitting at the door.  
—Ah, greetings, Kerry Toros, he said.  
—The grace of God [to you], Msr Melik, he responded.  
—You have come in such haste,  
Is it for a good purpose, Kerry Toros? asked Melik.  
—Thank God, said Kerry Toros,  
It is for a good purpose. Nothing [of concern].  
They sat down after the greetings. Kerry Toros said:  
—In God's name, let us come to an agreement.  
A hostage can be released to his people for a price.  
I am asking you to release David.  
I want to take him home.  
Melik said: —David died three days ago.  
Tears streamed down Kerry Toros' beard.  
David could not be found.

Kerry Toros mounted six-footed Lazky.  
[182] He left Msr in the morning  
And reached Sassoun in the evening.  
He gave the sad news to the people of Sassoun.

22.

Meanwhile David travelled  
A distance of five-six days  
With the two pahlevans.  
Bougha of Batman and Charbahar Kamy  
Wanted to kill David,  
But could not find the right moment.  
David did not walk with them;  
He went one way, then the other.  
He did not talk to them; he kept going, on and on.  
The pahlevans, too, kept going.  
David at times went ahead, at times fell behind,  
At times went off the road.

He kept apart from them,  
Played with stones and twigs, and chased  
Wild animals and birds through the hills and valleys.  
The pahlevans sat by the roadside,  
Ate the food and did not give any to David.

What was David doing?  
He was eating leaves that he gathered,  
Roots that he dug up in the fields, and  
Mushrooms that he picked from the hillside.  
Whenever he saw a quail, he shot it;  
Whenever he saw a rabbit, he caught and killed it.  
He paid no attention to the pahlevans.

When they reached the Bridge of Batman, Bougha said:  
—Charbahar, let us catch David now  
[183] And throw him into the river.  
David was out of their reach.  
The two pahlevans sat down to eat their food.  
They called out:  
—David, David, come here; hurry.  
David went to them and said:  
—It is five or six days we have been travelling,  
And you have not asked me once,  
'David, are you hungry, thirsty?'  
Why are you calling me now while you are on the bridge?  
They said: —David,  
Until now we were in Melik's land,  
Now we are in your father's land;  
That is why we are calling you.  
Come, eat with us.  
David said: —Ismil Khatoun gave us food for seven days,  
You ate it all and did not give me a morsel;  
Now that I am in my father's land,  
I will have none of your food.

David looked around.  
He saw that the two pahlevans walked  
To the end of the bridge and stopped.  
David went to them and asked:  
—Why did you stop?  
They replied: —We are waiting for you.  
Melik told us,  
'Look after David while crossing the bridge,  
So that he will not be frightened and fall into the river.'  
You are young, you will be frightened.  
David said: —From the time we left Msr to this day  
You did not say, 'David is a boy, he will be frightened'—  
Why do you say it now? You go on,  
Cross the bridge. I will follow you.  
David did not hear  
When the pahlevans said to each other:  
—Let one of us walk before him,  
[184] And one of us walk behind him;

At the middle of the bridge we will turn on him—  
One from the front, one from behind—  
Kill him and throw him into the river.  
Then they said: —No, David, one of us will walk before you  
And one behind you, so that you will not be frightened.  
David said: —We will do as you say.  
But he thought to himself:  
—All this time they were walking before me,  
Now one is walking ahead, one is walking behind. Why?  
No, they must have something in their mind.

23.

When they reached the middle of the bridge,  
The pahlevan in front turned around  
As the one behind came forward.  
—What are you going to do? asked David,  
Do you want to throw me into the river?  
He grabbed them both by their necks,  
Knocked their heads against each other again and again,  
Hung one on each side of the bridge, and said:  
—You don't know how to throw a man into the river;  
I will show you how.  
The pahlevans said to him: —For God's sake,  
Don't throw us into the river.  
David pulled them up and threw both on the ground,  
Put his knee on their chest and said:  
—Unless you tell me the truth,  
I will kill you and throw you both into the river.  
—David, they begged, we will bring you luck;  
Let us up; we will tell you the truth.  
David released them. They sat up.

For an hour they could not gather their thoughts;  
David had pounded them so thoroughly.  
He prodded: —Come, talk!  
[185] After a while they began to breathe easily.  
Their heads cleared. Charbahar Kamy then spoke:  
—David, if we conceal it from you,  
How can we conceal it from God?  
That infidel, wicked Melik,  
Forced us to come with you and kill you.  
Msrah Melik told us:  
'Take David to the Bridge of Batman and kill him,  
Fill a jug with his blood,  
Throw his body into the river, and  
Bring his blood so that I can drink and soothe my heart.'  
Now, I beg you, don't kill me.  
David did not kill Arab Bougha of Batman,  
He took pity on him, stood him up  
On the bridge and said: —Go.  
Bougha of Batman said: —Melik will kill us  
If we do not have your vest  
To dip it in blood and take it to him.



David saw a rabbit running.  
He chased it, caught it, slit its throat,  
Filled a jug with its blood,  
Dipped his vest in it and said:  
—Take this to Melik, tell him you killed David.  
Satisfied with this, Bougha started for Msr.  
Charbahar Kamy then said:  
—David, I have been raised at your father's spread.  
I did not know that  
You possessed such great strength and skill.  
When your father died, Melik took us prisoner.  
I will share your fate. No longer will I serve Melik.  
Because you are a man of such great strength and skill,  
I will serve you as long as you live,  
I will serve you for your father's sake.  
David said: —Come, let us go.  
[186] They kissed each other on the forehead,  
Started their journey, reached the boundary of Sassoun.

24.

That night Tzenov Hovan dreamt of David.  
He said: —God only knows whether David is alive or not.  
Probably our lad has entered our land  
And will be home before long.  
Tzenov Hovan said to his wife:  
—Saryeh, Saryeh, wake up! Saryeh grumbled:  
—Why don't you let me sleep, old one?  
Tzenov Hovan said: —Saryeh,  
You are an outsider, your heart never aches;  
Wake up, get up, open my heart and see.  
[I dreamt that] Our city walls were standing [firm].  
Our new vineyard was in bloom,  
The torches on our city walls were blazing,  
The bulbul in our vineyard was singing;  
It must be that our orphan David has entered our land.

[187]

## **David the Shepherd**

1.

On his way to Sassoun, to satisfy his hunger,  
David had eaten grass and anything he had found.  
Because of this he had become a bit foolhardy.  
His mind was in a daze.  
David and Charbahar kept going for a few more days  
Until they reached the outskirts of Sassoun.  
Calfherds and herdsmen, shepherds and lambherds  
Left their sheep and flocks, came to see David.  
They recognized from his garb that he belonged  
To the ruling House of Sassoun.  
A villager, to whom David had said

That he was going to Sassoun,  
'Sassoun is my homeland,'  
Took the news to Tzenov Hovan:  
—Hear me, Tzenov Hovan,  
Someone is coming—your son, David.  
Give me my reward.

Tzenov Hovan was overjoyed;  
He took the news to Kerry Toros.  
They left their big house, came to the townsmen  
And villagers, and said to them:  
—God granted our son back to us.  
Come, let us all go and meet David.  
People from the towns and villages came,  
[188] And, with Tzenov Hovan, went to meet David,  
To see what kind of a lad he was,  
Whether he was stronger than his father.  
—Hi, hi, which one is David?  
—Hi, hi, which one is David? they kept shouting.

Tzenov Hovan looked down the road.  
He saw a pahlevan and behind him a boy  
Straggling and wandering among the fields of origanum.  
Tzenov Hovan said: —Kerry Toros,  
That lad you see wandering around is our foolhardy David.  
The light of Sassoun is rekindled.

By the time David reached Sassoun,  
His sandals were worn out,  
His socks were in tatters,  
He was hungry and weary.  
When he saw the big crowd of people,  
He did not know where he was;  
He was bewildered. He said:  
—I am hungry, thirsty; how can I go to Sassoun?  
The villagers gave their hands to David.  
He did not respond, paid no attention,  
Kept walking in a daze,  
And did not know that they were Sassounites  
Who had come to welcome him.  
And Sassounites did not know of his condition,  
How weary, how hungry he was.  
Tzenov Hovan stepped forward, looked at David,  
Came to him and asked:  
—Where are you from, lad?  
—I am from the City of Sassoun, he replied.  
Tzenov Hovan said: —I have not seen you in Sassoun.  
This is the City of Sassoun,  
Have you any kin in Sassoun?  
David said: —My mother told me I have two uncles.  
—What are their names? Tzenov Hovan asked.

[189] —My elder uncle's name is Vergo,  
The other uncle's name is Tzenov Hovan.

[Hearing this,] Tzenov Hovan hugged David,  
And, with tearful eyes, kissed him on the forehead.  
He said: —Are you really David?  
I am your uncle Hovan.  
Kissing David again, Hovan,  
With great rejoicing, took him home.  
On the way home Hovan called: —Ey, brothers,  
Come out, light unto your eyes;  
Come out, light unto your eyes;  
Our David is home.

David's uncles came, hugged and kissed him.  
All the people of Sassoun were rejoicing.  
Tzenov Hovan said: —Praise the Lord,  
A son of ours is back with us. Our dove is home.  
We thought he was an intelligent lad;  
Alas, he is in a daze. Still I offer thanks to God.  
Hovan, his kinsmen, and the townspeople  
Sat down to a feast and made merry.  
They talked for a long time  
And one by one left for their homes.  
Tzenov Hovan and David were left alone.  
David asked: —Uncle, how are you faring?  
Hovan said: —Thanks to the Lord, son,  
By the grace of God and by the grace  
Of your father, we are faring well.  
—If that is so, it is well, said David.

2.

The following morning Tzenov Hovan rose,  
He touched the ground three times  
And gave thanks to God;  
[190] He said: —I offer my thanks to Thee, O Lord,  
For my dream that came true by your grace.  
The House of Sassoun has a green grove now.  
I and my brother need fear no more.  
He dressed David with new, handsome garments,  
He bulged his pockets with knuckle bones and raisins,  
Kissed him on the forehead and said:  
—David, go and play with the boys.  
David went to play.  
The boys cheated him and took all his knuckle bones.  
David slapped these [cheating] sons of the grandees  
And broke the neck of one of the boys.

In the evening the boy's mother came  
To Tzenov Hovan and complained.  
Tzenov Hovan said: —That is nothing, no harm is done,  
I will caution him not to fight again.  
Tzenov Hovan went to David and said:  
—Your uncle would die for you, David,  
Don't fight with people again.  
In the morning David went out again

And played with the boys.  
The boys again gathered in force  
And fell upon David.  
David fought back, broke the necks of three boys.  
Then the elders of the town assembled  
And talked among themselves:  
—That orphan brat has maimed our lads;  
We will kill him [David].  
Why did he break the necks of our boys?  
They came to Tzenov Hovan and said:  
—Where is David? Ask him to come in.  
—Why shall I call him in? he asked.  
They said: —Is that foolhardy David  
An enemy of our sons?  
[191] Why did he break their necks?  
Hovan was alarmed. He went to David and said:  
—God's wrath on you, David,  
Why did you maim those boys?  
—Hell to them, said David,  
They fought with me; I fought back.  
—The elders of the town are at our doors, said Hovan,  
Go face them, answer them.  
David came out and saw a big crowd  
Of people gathered at the door.  
Many of them, who had not seen David,  
Had come only to take a look at him,  
And many others had come to kill him.  
When David came out and people saw him,  
They trembled with fear and whispered to each other:  
—Let us not touch David.  
If he suspects [any move], he will kill us, too.

They all turned and walked away.

3.

The next day the elders of Sassoun  
Went to Hovan. They said:  
—Hovan, do you know why we have come to you?  
Yesterday we were terrified  
When we came to your door and saw David.  
Put him to work;  
If you do not put him to work,  
He will bring havoc to the city. Hovan asked:  
—What shall I do, what kind of work shall I put him to?  
They said: —Let us make a shepherd of him.  
He should not stay in the town.

Tzenov Hovan went home that night. He said:  
[192] —David, I would die for you, would you like to herd sheep?  
We are impoverished;  
You will earn a measure or two of millet for our food.  
David said: —Why wouldn't I, uncle?  
I don't want to stay idle.

You are a man of high standing.  
Our people have high regard for you,  
Put me to work in farming.  
Hovan said: —David,  
Our people want you to herd their sheep.  
They will give us a peck of millet  
And a peck of wheat for every sheep you herd.  
Can you herd sheep?  
David said: —I will tend them like flowers.  
Tzenov Hovan then told the townspeople:  
My nephew will herd your sheep this season.  
Bring your sheep to the city gate every morning.  
I will send David, he will round them up  
And take them away.

Neighbors of Tzenov Hovan said to him:  
—Hovan, have a pair of sandals made for David—  
Sandals that will last him.  
While herding the sheep,  
He will roam the mountains of Sassoun.  
Hovan said: —I will go now and have them made.  
Hovan went to the blacksmith  
And had a pair of sandals  
And a shepherd's crook made of steel.  
He gave them to David in the morning.  
David was pleased with his sandals.  
[193] Tzenov Hovan said:  
—Son, take the sheep to pasture beyond Mount Sassoun.  
Gather them at the fountain for their nooning—  
I will bring your food there at midday.

4.

David put on his steel sandals, took his steel crook,  
Went to the town square and called out:  
—Neighbors, bring your sheep, bring your kids,  
I will take them to graze at the mountains of Sassoun.  
The neighbors brought their sheep and kids  
To the city gate.  
When people saw David rounding up the sheep  
To take them to the mountains, they said:  
—Hovan, David will kill the animals.  
—David, said Hovan, these people are our neighbors;  
See that you do not kill their animals.  
Take them away safely,  
Bring them back safely in the evening.  
—Uncle, said David, am I a fool?  
I will take very good care of them.

David drove the sheep to a high mountain  
Where the sheep grazed to their fill.  
Then he drove them to a cave, left them unguarded,  
Lay down and fell asleep.  
He could not keep his eyes on the herd.

The sheep came out of the cave  
And scattered all around to graze.  
When he woke up, he found no sheep, no kids,  
They all were gone astray—lost.  
He went to the entrance of the cave—not a single sheep.  
He looked here—no sheep,  
He looked there—no sheep.  
He called and called in a loud voice and searched for them  
Among the mountains and valleys.  
[194] The clatter of his sandals,  
The echo of his loud call,  
Brought out the foxes and hares;  
They left their holes and ran, and ran, and ran.  
Seeing a hare in flight, David said,  
—Oh how that kid can run!  
He chased it—a young spotted hare.  
Then a marten, a fox ran by.  
David said: —Oh how these kids can run!  
He kept on chasing them  
Until exhausted, their tongues hanging out, they stopped.  
He caught all the foxes, martens, and hares,  
And herded them in his flock of lambs and kids.

His steel sandals were already worn out.

5.

At midday Hovan took food to David.  
[He saw what David had done.] He had run around  
So hard that his steel sandals had fallen to pieces,  
And his steel crook was worn out.  
Hovan said: —David, how are you faring?  
I would die for you, lad;  
If I have to get a pair of sandals  
And a crook for you every day,  
Your earnings will not pay for them.  
What will be our gain?  
David said: —Oh Uncle, tomorrow I will not take  
Those kids to pasture any more.  
I ran after them so hard today  
That I wore out my sandals.  
Hovan asked: —Why, David lad,  
Isn't sheep-herding a pleasant thing?  
—Yes, by the Cross, it is a pleasant thing, he said,  
[195] Those black kids are docile.  
I can get along with those red kids, black kids,  
But those kids with sparkling eyes, those white kids,  
And those kids with long ears, they never stand still.  
They tantalize me, always run away.  
Today they took my life without a warrant [*ankrogh*].  
So much those animals tormented me.  
—My lad, said Hovan,  
We don't have tan kids, white kids.  
David said: —No, Uncle,

We do have tan kids, white kids.  
If you don't separate them from the sheep in the morning,  
I will not take the herd out.  
—Come, said Hovan,  
Take the sheep out of the cave,  
I want to see those tan kids.

They went to the cave, opened the gate.  
David said: —Uncle, you go in,  
Drive the herd out; I will hold back those kids—  
You cannot hold them.  
—No, lad, said the uncle, you go in and drive them out.  
Let me hold them; you are too young.  
David went inside the cave,  
With a stick he hit the rocks here and there;  
The martens, foxes, and hares all rushed out.  
Seeing those foxes and hares,  
Hovan realized that David was taking them for kids.

They all ran away.  
David came out of the cave and asked:  
—Uncle, why did you let my kids run away?  
—My lad, they are wild animals, not kids, said Hovan,  
Let those tan kids go.  
[196] David said: —You let my kids run away,  
What shall I do? The owners will ask for their kids;  
I have no kids to give to them,  
What am I going to say to them?  
David said this and started for the mountains  
To round up the foxes and hares.  
His uncle roared after him:  
—God's wrath on you, David,  
They are wild animals; let them go.  
David paid no attention. He kept chasing the animals.

Uncle Hovan returned home. He said:  
—Janum! What was this soot we put on our face!  
Our foolhardy David has packed  
With the sheep every animal he has found.  
He cannot distinguish kids from hares.  
Neighbors, townsmen, for God's sake,  
Don't let David take your sheep to pasture in the morning.

6.

David kept on chasing the foxes and martens.  
The animals ran before him—  
Their tongues hanging;  
The sheep were panting and crowding  
Each other like blown-up skin bags.  
David chased the animals up and down the hills,  
Caught them and packed them with the herd,  
Saying: —May these animals and their owners perish!  
They don't let me rest,  
They don't keep still so that I can have my meal.

Out of fear of David the wild animals  
Did not run away again.

At sunset, he drove the sheep and animals back to town.  
[197] David's sandals were so worn out  
That he took them off, hung them on his crook,  
And walked barefoot.

He brought his flock to town and called:  
—Neighbors, come, take your sheep and kids away.  
I don't know who owns the kids with long ears;  
Come, take them, they will run away; I can't hold them.  
I don't know who owns the kids with long tails.  
They always run away.

I had to beat them to keep them among the sheep.

The townspeople, hearing this, said:

—David has rounded up all the foxes and hares  
And packed them with our sheep.

They picked their own lambs and kids.

[With their animals] they took home

Foxes, hares, and martens.

They killed the hares and ate them with the kids.

From the skins of foxes and martens

They made coats and wore them.

Ever since then

People have been killing hares to eat their meat,

And killing foxes and martens to wear their skins.

That night the elders went to Tzenov Hovan and said:

—You have made a shepherd of that foolhardy David.

He cannot distinguish lambs from wild animals.

He has brought down all the game from the mountains

And left none for hunting.

We don't want David to herd our sheep.

**(Continued on Next Page)**

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# David of Sassoun

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## *David of Sassoun*

### Part I

#### *David's Fight against Msrah Melik*

(Continued from Previous Page [197])

7.

The townspeople talked among themselves:  
—What shall we do with David?  
We will have him herd our cattle.  
David said: —You once had me herd your sheep,  
And you discharged me.  
[198] Now do you want me to herd your cattle?  
Tzenov Hovan said: —David, lad,  
The kids are giving you too much trouble;  
Don't take them out again.  
Take the cattle to pasture.  
[While they graze,] You can lie down and sleep  
Until I bring food to you.

Hovan had a new pair of steel sandals  
And another steel crook made for him.  
He gave them to David at dawn  
And called to the townspeople:  
—Hear ye, hear ye, bring your cattle to David,  
He will not take calves to pasture,  
Only your cattle.  
People brought their cattle.  
David rounded them up,  
Drove them to the plain of Sassoun  
And left them free to graze; he lay down and slept.

When he woke up from his sleep, he saw that  
The cattle had strayed to the edge of high rocks.  
He got up, ran after them,  
While bears and wolves began running out of their lairs.  
David said: —Curse on your owners' fathers!  
Again you are running away.  
They kept running; David chased them so long  
That, from exhaustion, they could run no more.  
He caught them, corralled them with the herd.  
He started again for the hills and valleys,  
And rounded up all the animals he saw.

He brought in lions,  
He brought in tigers,  
He brought in boars,  
He brought in wolves,  
[199] He brought in bears—  
He packed the plain with all these animals he had caught.  
In fear of David no beast would touch the other.  
If one would dare to touch the other or stir,  
David would lift it high and throw it down so hard that  
The beast would sink into the ground.  
The cattle stood in fear of the wild beasts,  
The beasts stood in fear of David,  
And David [as their master] stood before them all.

8.

That evening David drove his herd  
Into the city square of Sassoun;  
No one came out. The townspeople,  
Because of their fear, did not open their doors,  
They locked them and put up the bars.  
David stood in the city square,  
Shouted and shouted:  
—Hey, folks, come, take your cattle.  
Take them to their stalls. He said:  
—To those who have no cow, I have brought a cow;  
To those who have no ox, I have brought an ox.  
Open your doors, open;  
To those who had one, I have brought two;  
To those who had two, I have brought ten;  
To those who had ten, I have brought twenty;  
To those who had twenty, I have brought forty.  
Why don't you come and take your cattle?  
No one came to pick and take his animal home.  
He called again and again, no one came out,  
No one dared to come out.  
David became angry. He cursed:  
—Come out now. If you do not,  
May you never come out. Hell to you!  
I have brought home animals from the wilderness,  
[But] You don't want them. [Who cares!]  
[200] Let the animals go where they will.  
Oh, what a world! He said:  
—Try and do a good deed!  
David pulled his cap down over his face,  
Lay down in the square and slept till morning.

The elders went to Tzenov Hovan and said:  
—Our cattle will perish because of you.  
Your lad [David] brought havoc upon our town.  
We are afraid of those wolves, bears, and wild beasts.  
What is this? So many beasts!  
Our pregnant women died of fright.  
—If that is so, said Hovan,

I will go and bring David home.  
Hovan went out and called:  
—David, I would die for you. Tell those beasts:  
—If you belong to someone, stay;  
If you don't belong to anyone, go.  
David stood and called:  
—If you belong to someone, stay;  
If you don't belong to anyone, go.  
The wild beasts ran off to the mountains,  
The cattle remained in the city.

People unlocked their doors [came out],  
And took their cattle back to the stalls.  
—God's wrath on you! David said,  
You let the fattened cattle run off to the mountains  
And kept the lean ones here.

The elders said to Hovan:  
—This also failed, this also failed,  
This wretched lad is good for nothing.  
He is foolhardy, really foolhardy.  
[201] When David heard this, he said:  
—Curse on your heads! I will no more herd your cattle.  
Hovan became angry and said to David:  
—If this is the way you behave,  
I cannot look after you. Go where you please.

9.

David left Sassoun, found a place and slept.  
Kerry Toros came to Sassoun in the morning and asked:  
—Where is our lad David?  
Every man in Sassoun swore at David,  
Every woman in Sassoun cursed David.  
Kerry Toros went to look for the lad  
And found him where he had fallen asleep.  
He gave him such a kick that,  
If it were someone else but David,  
He would have sunk seven kazes deep into the ground.  
David woke from his sleep and asked:  
—Why are you kicking me, dear Kerry?  
-[Why shouldn't I?] Replied Kerry.  
What have you been doing, lad?  
—Kerry, said David, the cattle gave me so much trouble.  
And because of that, the townspeople drove me out.  
—You brainless, foolhardy Sassounite, Toros said,  
Don't tend cattle that always run away,  
Tend cattle that do not always run away.  
—No, said David, I will not stay here;  
Tell me of another place where I can go.  
But [this time] Kerry Toros took David to his home.

10.

Time went on.  
It was early in the spring.  
[202] —Kerry, said David, spring is here,  
It is ploughing time, farming time.  
We, forty people, are living in your house.  
You are not obliged to feed us all.  
Put us to work.  
We will go to work, bring our earnings in the autumn,  
Come together, eat and enjoy life.  
—Yes? said Kerry Toros, doom to your sun David!  
You want to be a laborer now?  
Laughing at David, Kerry Toros said: —David,  
You foolish lad, let me take you to Dashtou Padrial,  
I will have you hired as a herdsman.  
You will earn as your wage a peck of millet,  
You will bring it home,  
I will take it to the mill, grind it into flour,  
Take it to your aunt.  
She will knead it, bake it [into bread],  
Take it out of the tendour and give it to you.  
When you give me a piece of that bread  
And say, 'Kerry, this is the fruit of my toil,  
Take it, eat it,'  
Even then I will not believe it.  
—If that is what you think, Kerry, said David,  
Take me [there] and put me to work.  
Kerry Toros knew how stubborn David was—  
He would not change his mind.  
He took David to Dashtou Padrial  
And had him hired as a herdsman.  
Kerry Toros told David everything  
[That he should know]:  
—My lad, they have cattle of this and that kind.  
At sunrise you will take the herd to pasture  
Behind the Mountain of Sassoun. You will see there  
Sbidag Kar and a fountain beneath Sbidag Kar.  
Take your herd to water at that fountain at noon.  
[203] Kerry Toros left David with this advice  
And went back to Sassoun.

David took the herd to pasture in the morning.  
At noon he brought the cattle to the fountain at Sbidag Kar,  
He found [there] the herdsman of seven villages  
Herding their cattle.  
David said: —Ay, herdsman,  
Let us become brothers.  
David and the herdsman became brothers then.

11.

It was spring, rainy, wet, and muddy.  
The cattle were lean.  
They slipped, fell into the mud, shivered from the cold;  
Seven or eight of them sank in the mud every day.

David pulled them out of the mud,  
Tied their hoofs to his stick, and,  
Passing another stick between their legs,  
He swung them over his shoulder,  
And carried them to the village,  
To their owners and set them free.  
He would say to the housewives:  
—Nana, your animals are lean,  
The weather is cold, they shiver, sink in the mud,  
Can't come out; they will perish, I pity them.  
The women then blessed David and said:  
—May you have plenty for your hard labor,  
May you have plenty for your light labor.  
God safeguard you.  
Were it not for you,  
[204] Our cattle would have perished this year.  
The housewives then feasted him,  
Baked bread, made omelet for him,  
Gave eggs to him,  
And took good care of him.  
The village folk blessed David and said:  
—We have never had a herdsman like him.  
David herded the cattle through the summer;  
And the cattle fattened, became sturdy.

12.

Time passed. It was the Feast Day of the Assumption.  
They hold a vigil on Assumption Day;  
People go on pilgrimage [to fulfill their vows].  
They ask for [requiem] mass and prepare harissa [porridge].  
At the end of the church service,  
The worshippers join the one who has asked for the mass,  
And [with him] eat the harissa.  
On Assumption Feast Day, David rounded up  
His cattle at noon, took them to pasture  
By the fountain, beneath Sbidag Kar,  
Where he met the herdsman of seven villages.  
David saw villagers, elders going by in groups.  
He said: —Heavens, people have been going by  
From morning till noon.  
Where are they going?  
They said: —People are holding vigil [in church]  
And are preparing madagh [memorial meal].  
[On that occasion] They will play the saz,  
Dance and make merry,  
[205] Eat up the harissa, and leave.

A herdsman said:  
—Who would go and bring some harissa for us?  
We should have a bit.  
None of them would go.  
—As none of you will go, said David,  
I will go if you look after my herd.

I will bring all the harissa that you want to eat.  
But [on my return] if I miss one cattle from my herd,  
I will chop your heads off—all seven of you.

David went to get some harissa.  
He asked here and there  
—Where do they serve the harissa?  
People told him: —Right there.  
David went there. He saw a large copper  
Caldron with four bails placed on a tendour,  
And a woman standing nearby.  
David said to her: —Nana, Nana, give me  
A bit of that harissa, so that I can take it  
To my friends, the herdsmen of seven villages.  
[As you know,] The poorest in a village  
Are the shepherds and the herdsmen.  
Give me some harissa for the memory of your father.  
I will take it to my friends. The woman said:  
—Begone, you foolish Sassounite.  
Don't you know that the church service is not over?  
Wait until the service is over.  
We will have the harissa  
After the priest comes from the church and blesses it.  
David said: —Nana, I have left my cattle  
In others' care. There is no one here [to see you]  
Let me have some. I am in a hurry.  
My cattle will wander off; people will suffer losses.

[206] The woman said: —I will not give you any [food]  
Until the priest comes and blesses the harissa.  
After the worshippers have all been fed,  
I will give you the leftovers; you can take it and eat it.  
David said: —Nana, the leftover is given to dogs.  
When he said this, the woman cursed. David got angry,  
He pulled the caldron to the edge of the tendour,  
Passed his staff through the bail of the caldron,  
And put the caldron on his shoulder,  
Took a pot and capped his head,  
Took the crock of butter,  
Tucked under his arm all the bread they had baked,  
Grabbed seven ladles, saying:  
—These will serve as our spoons,  
May God accept your madagh.  
The woman then said to David:  
—Curse the madagh,  
What is there left to be accepted?  
David started out for Sbidag Kar.

The woman ran into the church with the news:  
—Doom to you folks, she said.  
Foolhardy David of Sassoun came  
And took away the harissa and all the bread.  
Everybody began to grumble.  
One of the men shouted:

—Go, kill David, bring back the harissa.  
Another man said: —Don't try to face him.  
And the priest said: —Don't go,  
There are two more caldrons of harissa over the fire.  
He is a foolish Sassounite. Don't go after him,  
He will beat you, he will maim you  
And bring shame on us.  
An elderly man then said:  
—He is Mher's son, don't go.  
[207] If four of you can lift  
That caldron with the four bails, go,  
If you can't, don't go. You are weaklings.

David reached Sbidag Kar,  
Put the caldron down, [took the pot off his head,]  
Filled the pot with harissa,  
Poured the butter over it with a ladle  
And called his shepherd companions:  
—Come, boys, have some harissa.  
Ey, [you,] why don't you come?

The herdsmen were frightened stiff;  
They looked downcast.  
David asked them:  
—Why are you so downcast?  
One of the herdsmen said: —David,  
Who wouldn't be downcast?  
Right after you left,  
Forty brigand devs attacked us  
And carried off forty heads of cattle.  
David said: —That is nothing, boys,  
Come, sit down, let us eat our fill.  
But the herdsmen, terrified, could not eat.  
David asked: —Boys,  
Do you know which way they drove the cattle?  
The boys said:  
—They went toward that mountain and turned the bend.

13.

David tucked his crook under his arm  
And took to the road.  
He turned the bend of the mountain,  
Searched high and low, could find no devs.  
[208] He then took the road below Arkig, near Subghank,  
Until he reached the crest of another mountain.  
There he saw smoke rising from caves.  
He walked toward the smoke [and reached the caves],  
Where he saw forty brigand devs  
Who had slaughtered the forty steers,  
Built a fire, and were cooking them  
In a huge copper caldron having forty bails.  
David lifted the huge caldron,  
Dumped the stew on the fire,

Gathered the hides of the forty steers,  
Put them in the caldron.  
Then he went inside the cave.  
And what did he see?  
Some devs lounging on their rugs,  
Others playing with their girdle,  
Some lying fast asleep,  
While others were making merry.

When David saw this his eyes popped.  
He turned away and came out,  
Took a huge rock, carried it to the cave,  
Blocked the entrance  
So that not one of the devs could escape.  
Then he let out a roar that terrified the devs.  
Their chieftain, hearing David's roar, said:  
—That is David, get up, mollify him  
So that he will not slaughter us.  
But David grabbed them one by one, twisted off their necks  
And threw their bodies out of the cave.

David looked around and saw that  
The cave was a treasure hoard,  
Full of everything that one would need.  
Along the walls of the cave  
[209] He saw a heap of gold, a heap of silver—  
All the wealth of Sassoun.  
Ever since the death of his father, Mher,  
These devs had been plundering  
And storing their loot in this cave.

14.

David filled his saddle bag with gold, tied it to his waist,  
Put the hides and hoofs of the forty steers  
In the caldron,  
Filled it up with gold,  
Thrust his crook through a bail,  
Hoisted the caldron up his back,  
And went to the place where harissa was served.  
He reached there  
While the priests were blessing the harissa.  
He put the caldron down at the church door,  
In a priest's care, and said:  
—Der-der [Priest], give me [a bit of] food to eat,  
My brother-herdsmen ate the food that I took.  
The priest, fearing David, said [to the people]:  
—Don't harm him,  
He took away our caldron and brought it back;  
Give him the food he wants. He will eat and go.

David sat and ate a bowl of harissa,  
Stood up, and facing the people,  
Spoke to the owners of the steers.  
—Don't lift your voice, I have something to say to you.



He took the hides out of the caldron, spread them out.  
People came and identified the skins of their steers.  
Then David said: —You will have the heads and hoofs  
Of your steers and the full value of the harissa.  
This large caldron is to replace your small caldron.  
[210] Take this gold,  
Share it [among yourselves] in payment of the meat  
Of your steers and the harissa I took.  
But leave the hides for the destitute herdsmen;  
Let them wear the skins in memory of my father.  
But, woe unto your heads, he said,  
If you deduct a handful of millet  
From the wages of my brothers.  
I will wreck your homes.  
They said: —Goodness! Take your grievance and begone!  
We will not deny your brothers their wages.  
David returned to his brother-herdsmen  
And saw that they had not eaten the harissa  
And were still downcast.  
He asked: —Brothers, how long will you be gloomy?  
Are you gloomy because I did not bring some salt?  
Come, eat the harissa now  
And have the salt at your home in the evening.  
They said: —Brother, what are we to do?  
What shall we say to the owners of those steers?  
David said: —I have returned the hides to the owners  
And have told them  
Not to deduct a single handful of millet from your wages.  
If they do, come and tell me,  
I will wreck their homes.  
The herdsmen then were cheered,  
They sat down and ate the harissa;  
When they finished eating, David said to them:  
—Separate the cattle, I want to go home.  
The herdsmen asked: —Why? It is only midday, David.

David gave them the ears of seven devs  
And said to them: —Go to the villagers and tell them  
To take their mules,  
Come to the cave and take away the loot.  
[211] The herdsmen then ran to their villages and said:  
—The devs carried away forty of our steers  
And slaughtered them,  
David went and killed the forty brigand devs.  
He wants you to come and take away the loot.  
The village men said: —You are lying.  
The herdsmen said:  
—If we have lied, you may cut off our ears.

15.

David stood up, gathered his herd,  
Drove it to Dashtou Padrial, and said [to the people]:  
—Come, take your cattle,

I will not herd them any more.  
He left for Sassoun, his home,  
Went to the chamber of Kerry Toros,  
Greeted him and asked: —Kerry,  
How many people do we have in our family?  
He said: —Forty, including you, lao [Kurdish: "lad"]  
David said: —Kerry, Lord's mercy on your father,  
How many males in our family?  
Kerry Toros said: —God take you!  
Didn't I tell you, lao.  
We have forty males, counting you.  
—Good, now tell me, how many sacks do we have?  
—Doom to your sun! replied Kerry, we have  
Forty sacks, including yours. What do you want?  
David said: —Don't be angry, Kerry Jan,  
Send word to these men to come with their sacks,  
We will go and bring home some gold.  
—Come, come, you foolhardy son of a dog,  
You could not bring [a grain of] millet,  
Are you bringing gold now?  
David said: —Kerry, come, let us go,

[212] I beg you, let us go;  
I will give you the wealth of the world.  
If thirty-nine men will come with me,  
We will bring thirty-nine sacks of silver and gold  
That belong to us; we will have it, enjoy it.  
If you don't get the silver and gold,  
You thirty-nine men can kill me and return home.  
Kerry Toros despised lying.  
He said: —Come, boys, let us all go,  
If David has lied, we will kill him.  
David then untied the bag he had tied to his waist,  
And poured out the gold before Kerry.  
Seeing the gold, Kerry Toros exclaimed:  
—David Jan, I would die for you and your sun,  
You have slaughtered the brigand devs!  
He hugged David, kissed him on both cheeks.

The thirty-nine kinsmen then took their mules  
And thirty-nine sacks;  
Tzenov Hovan and Vergo went, too,  
Each carrying one sack.  
They followed David, went on and on,  
Until they reached Sbidag Kar.

From Sbidag Kar they went to the cave,  
And at the entrance saw the devs lying dead—  
Everyone bloated like [mound] Bogh Blour [Bogh Hill]  
Vergo was so terrified that  
He pulled out his mule and ran away.  
Seeing the headless corpses and the heads of brigand devs,  
Others also, one by one, tried to run away.  
David turned around and shouted: —Hey, hey,

Home-wreckers, why are you running away?  
I have killed them.  
If you do not believe me, turn around and look,  
[213] I have chopped off their ears and piled them there.  
They turned around and saw the pile of chopped ears,  
Turned their mules and came back to the cave.  
David rolled away the rock at the entrance of the cave,  
And with Kerry Toros, Tzenov Hovan and Vergo  
Went into the cave.  
When they saw the gold and hoard of goods,  
They were swept off their feet by joy.  
The thirty-nine men filled their sacks with gold,  
Gathered and packed everything they saw,  
Loaded the mules and returned to their homes.

All this hoard they repositied  
In the storerooms of Sassoun.  
And Sassoun flourished. Sassoun rolled in wealth.

For himself David only took a horse from the cave.

[214]

## **David the Hunter Rebuilds His father's Monastery and Destroys the Army of Kholbashy**

1.

After slaughtering the brigand devs,  
David became the hero of his household.  
He picked a prize falcon  
And went to the fields  
To shoot sparrows and partridges.

There was an old widow living in Sassoun  
Who had been a favorite of Mher's.  
She had a field of millet  
Where sparrows and quails thrived.  
One day, the old widow saw that David,  
Riding a colt and carrying a falcon on his wrist,  
Was shooting sparrows and quails in her field.  
—Woe to your son, David, she said,  
What are you doing,  
Shooting quails in my millet field?  
Aren't there any wild sheep at the mountains?

[215] Go, hunt there.  
How much meat can you get out of a sparrow?  
Are you going to be satisfied with the sparrows  
In an old widow's millet field?  
David asked: —Old One, if I go to hunt at the mountains,  
What shall I shoot the wild sheep with?  
—With bow and arrow, she said.  
Ask them to give you your father's bow and arrow.  
—Oh! said David [in surprise].

Who has my father's bow and arrow?  
She said: —Go and ask your uncle's wife.  
David went to his uncle's wife, Saryeh, and asked:  
—Aunt Saryeh, where is my father's bow and arrow?  
—I would die for you, David, she said, I do not know.  
I have seen your father carrying a bow and arrow,  
But I do not know where it is now.  
Getting nowhere with her,  
David went back to the old widow at the millet field  
And said to her:  
—Old One, my aunt will not tell me  
Where the bow and arrow is.  
—I would die for you, my foolhardy, lisping David, she said.  
Go, plague your aunt and force her to give it to you.  
—How shall I plague her, Old One?  
She said: —Roast some pebbles and say to her,  
'Unless you tell me where the bow and arrow is,  
I will force you to eat these hot pebbles.'  
David went to Saryeh and said to her: —I am hungry.  
Saryeh said: —We have no bread.  
David, sitting at the edge of the tendour,  
Was roasting pebbles and making a commotion.  
Saryeh was annoyed.  
—David, she said, go to the barn, bring some firewood,  
I will knead some dough  
And bake some bread for you to eat.  
David went to the barn for some firewood;

[216] There he saw an arch-like stick hanging on the wall.  
He took the stick, brought it in, and asked:  
—What is this, Aunt Saryeh?  
—I don't know, she said, your uncle knows.  
David became angry. He said:  
—Tell me, Aunt, what is this bent stick?  
Saryeh said: —If you can tighten the string of that stick  
To the flint, I will tell you;  
If you cannot, I will not tell you.  
David held the bent stick  
And readily drew the string tight to the flint.

Saryeh was amazed. She said [to herself]:  
—Mher used to take an hour to tighten the string;  
This boy drew the string to the flint so easily.  
She said to David:  
—I do not know what that is. Let it go.

David then took Saryeh's hand,  
Dragged her to the roasting pan,  
Grabbed a handful of hot pebbles,  
Put them in Saryeh's palm and closed her hand.  
Saryeh screamed, 'yaman, yaman' and said:  
—I would die for your son, David,  
Let me go, I will tell you.  
—Throw the pebbles down, Aunt Saryeh,

She threw them down and said:  
I do not know, I will not tell you.  
David said: —I will do it again, Aunt.  
Saryeh then said:  
—David, that is your father's bow and arrow;  
Mher used to hunt with it.  
David was overjoyed. He took the bow and arrow,  
Cleaned off the dust,  
Washed the dirt, scraped the rust,  
[217] And slung the bow across his back.  
He went hunting every day.

2.

A month or two passed.  
David was a handsome, virile lad.  
No wonder that Saryeh, Tzenov Hovan's wife,  
Was secretly coveting him.  
[One day] She said: —David, come to my arms.  
—Aunt Saryeh, said David,  
You are a mother to me; I am a son to you.  
She said to herself: —I will take a bath  
And have David pour water on my head;  
When he sees my body, he will desire me  
And will come to my arms.  
She brought water, [sat down for her bath,]  
And asked David to pour water on her head.  
While David poured water, he closed his eyes,  
So that he would not see his aunt's body  
And sin in his heart.  
When she finished her bath and stood up,  
She saw that David had his eyes closed.  
She cried, banged her head, bled her face,  
Ruffled up her hair,  
Went to her room, sat, and waited  
Until her husband, Tzenov Hovan, came.  
—Wife, what happened to you? he asked.  
—What hasn't happened to me? she replied.  
I thought you had brought a son to me,  
I didn't know that you had brought a husband [instead].  
—That is not so, you are lying, woman!  
—No, I am not lying, she said.  
He put his hands on me,  
[218] I did not let him [touch me].  
—If that is the truth, we will lock the doors tonight.  
Tzenov Hovan locked the doors that night  
And did not let David in.  
David said to him:  
—Uncle, with one kick I can break down your door  
And send you and your door to the bottom of the earth,  
But what can I do, fatherly Uncle?  
You have been fooled by a shameless wench.

3.

That night David stayed in the old widow's hut;  
In the morning he went out to hunt.  
On his way he saw a flock of crows descending  
On the old woman's millet field  
And devouring all the grain.  
David thought to himself:  
—How can I kill twenty crows at once  
Before they fly away?  
No! I am going to do something.  
He pulled up a big plane tree  
And landed such a smashing blow that  
He swept all the crows and the millet stems into a heap.  
The old widow came and saw  
That not one stem of millet was left standing in the field.  
—Woe, woe, Krogh-death take you, David, she said,  
Why have you ruined my millet field?  
—Old One, said David, I did not want the crows  
To eat up your millet.  
—The Evil Ones take you, the Krogh strangle you, lad,  
Do you have to unleash your anger  
Over the millet field of an old widow?  
The Lord's fire consume you,  
Were you to be the son of that father?  
[219] God's mercy on Mher's soul,  
He was a father to the poor;  
But, you! See what you have done.  
This patch of millet was my only hope,  
You came and ruined it.  
I am a lonely woman [with] a millet field,  
Are you destroying my livelihood?  
If you are such a powerful lad,  
Why don't you go to Dzovasar?  
If you are so brave, go,  
Take back your father's hunting ground.  
Dzovasar is your father's pleasure park.  
Msrah Melik seized it many years ago.  
They have built a wall around that park  
And imprisoned many beasts and wild sheep  
That cannot escape.  
Why don't you go there?  
Are you showing off your strength to me?  
—Old One, said David,  
I would die for your soul, I would die for your sun,  
Tell me, where is that park? [Where is Dzovasar?]  
—I do not know where Dzovasar is.  
David, she said, go, get hold of your uncle.  
He will take you there.

4.

David went to his uncle and said:  
—Tell me, where is Dzovasar,  
Where is my father's pleasure park?  
—My lad, said his uncle, they have fooled you,

There is no pleasure park belonging to your father,  
They have fooled you, they are lying to you.  
—No, Uncle, said David, I know there is;  
Don't lie to me. I am going there, I will not wait.  
[220] His uncle said:  
—Whoever told that to you, may his tongue wither.  
Msrah Melik seized the park when your father died, lad.  
We do not dare to go there.  
—Tell me, where is it, Uncle? asked David.  
If they capture me, they will kill me, not you.  
His uncle said:  
—We will go there the day after tomorrow.  
David became angry.  
He said: —Will you tell me now where Dzovasar is?  
If you don't, by the Bread and Wine and the Eternal Lord,  
I will slap your face and break your neck.  
His uncle became alarmed,  
He saw that David was in a foolhardy mood again.  
—Don't be angry, lad, he said,  
Come, I will take you there [now].

Tzenov Hovan went to Kerry Toros and the townsmen  
And said to them:  
—I don't know who has told David about Dzovasar,  
He is forcing me to take him there now.  
The townsmen said: —Hovan, if you are going,  
We are also coming to see the place.  
The park is packed with huge bears,  
Wolves, deer, and wild sheep.  
There we will see how David kills wild sheep.  
David mounted his horse and headed for Dzovasar.  
Tzenov Hovan, the townsmen, all went with him.  
They rode on, reached the park—high in the mountains.  
And what did they see?  
A high wall built around the park, without a door.  
During the years after Mher's death  
Dzovasar was over-run  
By deer, wild sheep, wolves, and bears.  
David asked: —Uncle, what is this wall [for]?  
—It is the wall of your father's game reserve.  
David climbed the nearby hill,  
[221] Looked around; he saw [nothing but] a wall around.  
Wherever he turned and looked, he saw no door.  
Then invoking:  
—In the name of the High Madonna of Marout,  
He hurled his mace [at the wall]; the wall collapsed.  
David went into the park. What did he see?  
A luxuriant garden, an orchard of fruit trees,  
A large swimming pool,  
And a stream of gurgling water flowing into the pool,  
And all kinds of animals [abounding there].  
David said: —What a sin my father has committed  
By imprisoning these animals!  
The townsmen who were with him

Wanted to shoot some sheep.  
David looked around, watched them, and shouted:  
—Ey, you have no right [to shoot]!  
Do not shoot one of them, and  
Do not get near them.. I will not let you shoot them.  
Tzenov Hovan said I would die for you, David,  
Shoot one, we will make a sacrificial offering.  
—Goodness, Uncle, said David,  
Anyone can kill a captive animal.  
He is the real man who sets the animal free,  
Then shoots him.  
Are they not captives, Uncle?  
Does a man kill a captive?  
With one blow David knocked down the walls;  
He took off his mantle, tossed it in the air and shouted:  
—Hey, hey!  
All the animals ran out.  
David said: —Go, you are free.  
He searched the hills and valleys,  
Looked beneath every stone, rock, and tree,  
Walked around, saying: —It will be a pity  
If one of these animals, asleep, is left behind.  
David chased all the animals out of the park,  
Then he said to the townsmen:  
[222] —Now, the daring among you may go and shoot.  
Those who were daring went after the game.  
Those who were timid, stayed behind. [In time,]  
They all returned to Dzovasar.  
David also went, caught two wild sheep and  
Brought them to the swimming pool.  
He bathed in the pool, came out;  
The townsmen slaughtered, sacrificed the sheep to God,  
Built a fire and roasted the sheep.  
They all ate the roast and rested there.

**(Continued on Next Page)**

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# David of Sassoun

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## *David of Sassoun*

### Part I

#### *David's Fight against Msrah Melik*

(Continued from Previous Page [222])

5.

David and the men lingered on.  
At nightfall the townsmen returned to their homes.  
—David, said Hovan, we must go home, too.  
—Uncle, said David, my father has walked  
Over this ground for many days,  
I will stay here this night.  
—David, said Hovan, people do not stay out at night,  
They go home.  
The townsmen are gone to their homes,  
We must go to our home, too.  
—Uncle, said David, this is my father's land.  
I will stay here this night. You go ...  
He lay down to sleep beneath the trees.  
—David, said Hovan,  
If you are staying, I am staying, too.

A little later David went to sleep.  
Hovan kept awake. He did not dare to fall asleep.  
He was thinking to himself:  
—How can I keep David here, with me?  
I will put the edge of his cloak beneath my head,  
So that he will not leave me at night and go away.  
Hovan took the edge of David's cloak, rolled it,  
And quietly put it beneath his head and fell asleep.  
[223] But David was restless . . .  
It was midnight.  
He awoke from his sleep,  
Sat up, looked around . . . What did he see?  
A light shining atop the mountain,  
And an arc of light in the sky.  
He said [to himself]: —I wonder what that light is;  
I will go and see who the men are out there.  
Trying to get up,  
He saw that Hovan had the edge of his cloak

Beneath his head and was sleeping on it.  
—O Lord God, he said,  
If I wake him up, he will think I am frightened;  
If I don't wake him up, I can't take my mantle.  
David woke his uncle up and asked:  
—What is that red-green light shining over the mountain?  
Hovan knew that the light was shining from Mher's tomb.  
But he lied to David and said:  
—Probably some shepherds or herdsmen  
Have made a fire there.  
But David did not believe him.  
They both went to sleep again side by side.  
Tzenov Hovan again put the edge of David's cloak  
Beneath his head, so that David could not move.  
A little later, David suddenly awoke from his sleep  
And saw a marble slab, uncovered, atop the mountain,  
With a heavenly light shining over it.  
David this time did not wake up his uncle.  
He thought to himself: —It will be a pity  
If I cut the edge off my mantle with a knife,  
But, hell to pity, he said.  
Taking out his knife,  
David cut off the edge of his cloak.  
The edge remained beneath Hovan's head.  
He followed the light, climbed up to the spot.  
There he found a tomb.  
A red-green flame was coming out of the tomb,  
[224] And an arc of light was hanging over the tomb.  
David went to the flame, touched it;  
It did not burn his hand.  
He threw some earth over the flame; it did not die out.  
Then he thought to himself:  
—This must be the shrine of the High Madonna of Marout.  
To mark the spot,  
He thrust his bow and arrow into the ground,  
And came down to his uncle.

6.

When David came down, he found his uncle still asleep,  
He sat beside him and said to him:  
[Chanting:]  
—Uncle, awake from your sweet sleep,  
Uncle mine, I would die for you, Uncle mine,  
I have no guardian, be a guardian to me;  
Uncle mine, I would die for you, Uncle mine,  
I have no father, be a father to me;  
Uncle mine, I would die for you, Uncle mine,  
I have no mother, be a mother to me;  
Uncle mine, I would die for you, Uncle mine,  
I have no brother, be a brother to me.  
His uncle got up and asked:  
—Foolhardy lad, what has happened?  
David said: —Uncle, blessed is the benevolent Lord,

Great is the providence of the Lord,  
A slab of marble has just appeared atop the mountain,  
And an arc of light is hanging over Dzovasar.  
Come with me; I will take you there.

David took his uncle to his father's tomb.  
Pointing it to him, he asked: —What is that?  
—It is your father's tomb, said Hovan;  
And that monastery in ruins,  
Mher, your father, built it and named it:  
[225] The Shrine of the High Madonna of Marout.  
But, the day your father died,  
Msrah Melik pillaged and destroyed it to its foundation.

When David heard this, he knelt down on his knees,  
Touched the ground with his hands and kissed it.  
Then with his bow and arrow  
He drew a wide circle around the tomb,  
And in the form of a crescent outlined the altars,  
Marked the places of the bema and the foundation.  
Then he said: —This is the way it will be rebuilt.  
[Chanting:]  
—Uncle mine, I would die for you, Uncle mine,  
I want five hundred—figure one thousand—  
Stone cutters, I want from you;  
I want five hundred—figure one thousand—  
Stone trimmers, I want from you;  
I want five hundred—figure one thousand—  
Gravel carriers, I want from you;  
I want five hundred—figure one thousand—  
Masons, I want from you;  
I want five hundred—figure one thousand—  
Plasterers, I want from you;  
I want five hundred—figure one thousand—  
Wood carvers, I want from you.  
If I do not build this monastery, I will die forsworn.  
I want the building finished by nightfall tomorrow,  
So that at sunrise, the next day,  
Mass can be celebrated there.

Hovan knew that David said a word once, not twice.  
He listened to David and said:  
—Let us go to the city and get the workmen.  
David said: —I will stay here beside this marble slab,  
I will not come to the city.  
You go, get the workmen and craftsmen,  
And bring them here.

[226] Tzenov Hovan said to himself:  
—I will do what the lad wishes.  
Then [turning to David] he said:  
—Son, I am Tzenov Hovan; have no doubt.  
My voice is heard at a distance of forty days.  
Craftsmen of seven cities and workmen in thousands

Will come to us as soon as they hear my call.  
Go, shoot seven wild oxen; I will take them to the city  
And hold a feast for the townsmen.  
At my call then craftsmen and workmen  
Will assemble here.  
Your heart's desire will be fulfilled:  
The monastery will be built.  
David went, shot six wild oxen;  
Hovan took them on his back, went to Sassoun.

7.

At daybreak Hovan called in his bellowing voice.  
[Chanting:]  
—Hear ye, I am calling, come;  
All ye who love the Lord, come;  
We will build the Shrine of the High Madonna of Marout,  
Hear ye, I am calling, come;  
Hear ye, I am calling, come;  
Five hundred—figure one thousand—stone cutters;  
Five hundred—figure one thousand—stone trimmers;  
Hear ye, I am calling, come;  
Hear ye, I am calling, come;  
Five hundred—figure one thousand—gravel carriers;  
Five hundred—figure one thousand—water carriers;  
Hear ye, I am calling, come;  
Hear ye, I am calling, come;  
Five hundred—figure one thousand—wood carvers.  
Five hundred—figure one thousand—masons.  
Hear ye, I am calling, come;  
Hear ye, I am calling, come.

[227] Hovan's voice was heard in seven cities.  
The workmen and craftsmen of those seven cities  
Came to Hovan's home by the thousands.  
Paid him their respects and went with him to build  
The Shrine of the High Madonna of Marout.  
What had David done in the meantime?  
He had dug the foundation and set the foundation stones  
Along the line that he had drawn  
Around the marble slab,  
And erected the wall one waist-line high.  
When Tzenov Hovan brought the craftsmen,  
They saw in amazement what David had done.  
He had brought and set into the foundation  
Such huge stones that all the workmen together  
Would not have been able to carry them.

The masons stood upon the wall,  
David lifted the huge blocks of stone  
And set them in their place.  
Neither the workmen could have carried  
Those blocks of stone,  
Nor the masons could have lifted

And set them in place.  
The workmen brought the smaller stones and  
The masons set them between the large ones.  
The workmen mixed the mortar,  
Passed it to the masons;  
The masons poured it between the stones.  
By nightfall the building was finished.  
In one day they had built  
The Shrine of the High Madonna of Marout.

8.

They went to sleep that night.  
The Madonna appeared to David in his dream, saying:  
—Draw your sword [and on that sword]  
[228] Lay the foundation of my shrine.  
You will rebuild the shrine in one day,  
Have mass celebrated in it. [If you do this,]  
My shrine will stay on its foundation;<sup>80</sup>  
[If you do not,  
Any shrine you build will collapse.]  
David awoke from his dream and found that  
The Shrine of the High Madonna of Marout had vanished.  
The stones were back where they were before,  
The soil was back where it was before,  
The sand, the clay, and other things,  
All were back where they had been before.

David awoke; he awoke then  
Tzenov Hovan and Kerry Toros:  
—Uncle, Kerry, awake from your deep sleep.  
The High Madonna of Marout appeared in my dream.  
I will draw my sword and on my sword  
I will lay the foundation of the shrine.  
I must rebuild the shrine in one day  
And have mass celebrated in it.  
Hovan was mystified, but he said:  
—David, I am Tzenov Hovan;  
At daybreak I will call again,  
Workmen will come and build the shrine once more.  
In the morning Tzenov Hovan called again,  
Workmen and craftsmen came by the thousands.  
They saw that David had brought  
Massive blocks of stone for the foundation,  
Had drawn his sword and set it in the foundation.  
They erected the stone walls, kept working feverishly,  
And by nightfall finished the building.  
[229] At sundown David said: —My fatherly Uncle,  
Pay the craftsmen and workmen their wages;  
No one should leave without his wage.  
Hovan then went and brought two-three sacks of gold,  
Stood at the door of the shrine,  
And gave a gold piece to each workman.  
All the workmen and craftsmen went to their homes.

David then said to Tzenov Hovan:

[Chanting:]

—Uncle mine, I would die for you,  
I need forty bishops; get them for me;  
I need forty Vardapets; get them for me;  
I need forty archdeacons; get them for me;  
I need forty sacristans; get them for me.  
They will consecrate the shrine  
And celebrate mass on Saturday.  
The Vardapets came, consecrated the shrine,  
And celebrated mass on Saturday.

David was so pleased with the shrine that  
He went and brought Charbahar Kamy  
To be the watchman of the shrine.  
His daily ration was one pelt bag of honey  
And one pelt bag of butter.  
David gave orders to Charbahar Kamy:  
—Do not open the door of the shrine to brigands,  
Open the door to pilgrims and destitutes,  
And give them food.

9.

That night they stayed at the monastery.  
In the morning David saw that  
A river was flowing between Sassoun and Marout.  
David said: —A bridge should be built over this river;  
[230] Without a bridge, people may fall in the river.  
They sank rocks for the piers of the bridge,  
But the current carried away the rocks.  
They could not build the piers.  
David rolled huge boulders into the river;  
Each boulder was as big as a house.  
On those boulders they built four piers,  
Set other rocks over those piers,  
Threw the span and completed the bridge.  
The bridge was so wide that  
Two ox carts could drive side by side.  
The bridge was named David Bridge.  
A few days later David and Uncle Hovan  
Went to Sassoun to see  
What had been going on in the city.

10.

Word had reached Msrah Melik that  
David had seized Dzovasar,  
Set free all the captive animals,  
Wrecked the walls and rebuilt the monastery of Marout.  
Msrah Melik was enraged;  
His jealousy would not subside.  
He summoned his Kholbashy and said to him:  
—I am going to take an army of horsemen,  
Go to Mount Marout,

Pillage the monastery and return with the loot.  
Kholbashy said: —Long live the King!  
Why should you lead the mounted soldiers yourself?  
With five hundred horsemen  
We will go to Dzovasar, pitch tents,  
Pillage the monastery and return with the loot.  
We will kill David, too; cut off his ears,  
And bring them to you.  
[231] Msrah Melik said: —If you do that,  
I will reward you with a city.  
Make your preparations, go to Dzovasar,  
Pillage, destroy the monastery, and return;  
Kill David and bring his ears to me.

11.

Kholbashy started his march with five hundred horsemen.  
He did not dare to go through Sassoun,  
But marched [directly] on High Madonna of Marout.  
Watching the roads, Charbahar Kamy saw  
Hundreds of horsemen riding across the plain.  
He said to himself: —If these are pilgrims,  
They would not be all on horseback,  
Some would be mounted, some would be on foot.  
They seem to be robbers, brigands.  
I will lock, bar the door,  
And brace my back against it.  
If they are pilgrims, I will open the door and let them in;  
If they are brigands, I will not unlock the door.  
They will go away then.  
And Charbahar Kamy braced his back against the door.

Kholbashy came with his five hundred horsemen.  
They fought hard, but could not force the door.  
An ingenious man among the soldiers said:  
—Let us kill a hare, find a cloak like David's,  
Dip it in the blood [of the hare], raise it up  
At the end of a spear,  
Throw it over the high wall, and say,  
"Charbahar Kamy, we have killed your master,  
What will you do now, where will you go?"  
When he sees David's bloody cloak,  
He will open the door; we will go in.  
[232] They brought the cloak, threw it over the wall;  
Charbahar Kamy saw the cloak and said to himself:  
—This is David's cloak.  
He sprinkled a handful of ashes on his head,  
But did not open the door.  
They did all they could,  
But could not force the door open.

12.

Kholbashy went close to the wall and shouted:  
—Monks, Vardapets, open the door.

I have killed your master, infidels,  
Why do you refuse to open the door?  
We went and killed David of Sassoun;  
Your patron is dead.  
If you do not open the door,  
We will stay here, until black pitch turns white.  
Hearing this, the Vardapets said to each other:  
—They have destroyed the city of Sassoun,  
They have killed our patron.  
How shall we live on this earth?  
That night, while Charbahar Kamy was asleep,  
Seized by fear, the monks unlocked the door of the wall.  
Charbahar Kamy awoke from his sleep  
And saw that the door was open.  
He fled to the mountains.  
Kholbashy entered the cloister,  
Stood at the door, held it open,  
And let in his five hundred men.  
They pillaged and destroyed the shrine,  
Killed forty Vardapets at the altar,  
Killed forty Archdeacons in their cells,  
Killed forty Sacristans,  
And forty Deacons less one  
Who hid himself beneath the heap of corpses.  
When Kholbashy and his soldiers left,  
[233] He crept out,  
Took the vestment of a [dead] deacon,  
Dipped it in the blood of the slaughtered men  
And took the news to David in Sassoun.

13.

The deacon reached Sassoun  
And went to Tzenov Hovan's house.  
There he saw David feasting  
On roast geese and pilaf, [and]  
Drinking seven-year-old pomegranate wine;  
Lounging with one leg over the other,  
He was making merry with a group  
Of young lads and maidens.  
The deacon went and stood before David.  
—What has happened? asked Tzenov Hovan.  
—Our cloister has been pillaged, said the deacon,  
David is a fool ... to sit here . . . feasting!  
Tzenov Hovan slapped the deacon's face.  
—Why did you slap the deacon, Uncle? asked David.  
—Because he said you are a fool  
To be sitting, feasting here, Tzenov Hovan said.  
David called the deacon and said:  
—Come, sit down, and tell me,  
Is my cloister short of anything?  
Is it incense, is it oil? What is your need?  
Get it quickly and get back promptly  
For the divine service.



[Chanting:]

—David, said the deacon,  
They killed forty Bishops,  
They killed forty Vardapets,  
They killed forty Archdeacons,  
They killed forty Sacristans,  
They killed forty Deacons less one.  
They pillaged the cloister, carried away the loot.  
[234] —Oh, said David, why are you pounding my head?  
And turning to Tzenov Hovan, he said:  
—Uncle, the deacon is here,  
Is he short of incense, oil or candles?  
Give him what he needs so that he will go.  
The deacon was perplexed,  
He could not make David understand.

David did not understand what had happened.  
The deacon then spread the bloody vestment before David  
And said: —God's wrath on you!  
Where are your Bishops?  
Where are your Vardapets?  
Where are your Archdeacons?  
The sight of the bloody vestment  
Sobered David. He asked:  
—What is that, lad, what has happened?  
The deacon said: —I would die for you, David.

[Chanting:]

They killed forty Bishops,  
They killed forty Vardapets,  
They killed forty Archdeacons,  
They killed forty Sacristans,  
They killed forty Deacons less one,  
They pillaged the cloister, carried away the loot.  
—Oh, said David, the cloister has been pillaged?  
The Vardapets have been slain?  
Is that what you are saying, deacon? Who did it?  
— Kholbashy, said the deacon,  
With five hundred horsemen.  
He killed them all; I barely escaped.  
—Deacon, asked David,  
Did they stay or did they leave right away?  
The deacon said: —They went back to their place,  
And I came here.  
[235] David stood up and said:  
—Young men, young maidens, eat, drink,  
And make merry. I am on my way.

David hurried to the hut of the old widow and asked:  
—Old One, what road do I take to overtake Kholbashy?  
He has plundered my cloister and carried away the loot.  
The old widow pointed the way and said:  
—Go to the Batman river, wait for him at the bridge,  
Wherever he goes,  
Kholbashy must go across that bridge.

David took off his shoes, rolled up his sleeves,  
Pulled up a plane tree, stripped its branches,  
Put it under his arm,  
Went and stood beneath a big rock.  
He waited there watching [the road] for a long time.  
He heard no sound, no footsteps.  
David said to himself:  
—They must have crossed the bridge.  
Suddenly he heard Kholbashy say:  
—We ruined David.  
We plundered his monastery,  
Killed forty Bishops, forty Vardapets.  
Now let him come and overtake me.  
Upon hearing this David shouted:  
—Kholbashy, how will you escape now?  
Kholbashy looked around and saw that  
David, holding a plane tree,  
Has fallen upon his soldiers,  
Is mowing them down and sweeping them into the river—  
Once from one side  
Then from the other side of the bridge.  
He slaughtered the soldiers on the bridge  
And the rest he threw into the river and drowned them.  
David looked around and saw that no one had escaped  
Except Kholbashy, who had reached the end of the bridge.  
[236] David shouted: —Hey, rider, I can overtake and kill you,  
But I will not.  
Go, give my greetings to Melik,  
Tell him Sassoun is alive and mighty.  
He must not do this again,  
What would he gain through destruction?  
But did Kholbashy dare to turn and say a word?  
He spurred his horse and dashed away.  
David returned to Sassoun.

[237]

## **David Punishes the Tax Collectors of Msrah Melik**

The news reached Msr.  
People went to Msrah Melik and asked:  
—Melik, what are you going to do?  
That foolhardy Sassounite has slaughtered your soldiers.  
Msrah Melik held a council;  
Summoned all the wise men and  
Asked them to suggest a way  
To put an end to David's life.  
In the council there was a bold  
Pahlevan, named Gosbadin, who said:  
—Long live the King, I do not think it befits you  
To march on that infidel.  
If you give me one thousand pahlevans,  
I will attack, ransack Sassoun, and bring to you  
Forty tall women to load camels,

Forty short women to grind grain,  
Forty beautiful virgin maidens,  
Forty heads of cattle, forty heifers,  
Forty camel loads of silver,  
Forty camel loads of gold as your tribute.  
I will pillage and destroy Sassoun,  
[238] Kill David and bring his head to you.  
Melik said: —Brave Gosbadin, march on Sassoun,  
Collect the tribute of seven years,  
Bring forty tall women to load camels,  
Forty short women to grind grain,  
Forty beautiful virgin maidens,  
Cattle, heifers, gold and silver,  
And David's head.  
Gosbadin then asked Melik,  
—What will you give me [in return]?  
Melik said: —If you do all of that,  
I will give you half of my kingdom.  
Gosbadin then picked one thousand valiant men  
And prepared to march on Sassoun.

2.

Badin, Gosbadin, Soudin, Charkhadin,  
And the army of Melik set out on their march.  
The women of Msr, seeing them on their way,  
Danced and sang to them:  
[Chanting:]  
—Greetings, Badin and Charkhadin,  
Where are you going in such haste?  
Hey, Gosbadin, hey, Soudin,  
You look like two wild beasts.  
Gosbadin said to the women:  
[Chanting:]  
—Go to your homes now and keep a mournful vigil;  
Come out to dance and sing [when we return].  
We go to sack and destroy Sassoun,  
Bring red oxen to plough your fields,  
Prize cows to give you milk  
For your butter and dry-curd.  
One of the women then turned and said:  
—The foolhardies of Sassoun? As I know them . . .  
Would they give you the things you want? [I wonder.]

3.

[239] Gosbadin set out with his army,  
Marched on, approached Sassoun,  
And pitched his tents on the plain.  
With forty picked men and forty camels  
He went to Tzenov Hovan  
To collect the tribute of seven years.

He said: —Melik has sent us  
To collect the tribute of seven years.

Hovan was alarmed—fearful of what David would do.  
He called him and said:  
—David, today I am craving for wild sheep's meat.  
Go, shoot a sheep so that I can have some of its meat.  
Under this pretense he sent David to the mountains  
So that he would not know that they pay tribute.  
David went to the mountains.  
Gosbadin and Vergo set out  
And gathered forty maidens, shut them in a hayloft;  
They gathered forty tall women  
And shut them in another hayloft;  
Gathered forty short women  
And shut them in a separate hayloft;  
They took the old widow's daughter,  
They took cattle, heifers, oxen, and cows,  
And corralled them in other haylofts.  
Soudin, Charkhadin, Badin, Gosbadin  
Then went to the underground treasure house,  
Sat around the koursy  
To watch Vergo measure off the gold  
And pour it into Melik's sacks.  
Meanwhile Melik's army entered Sassoun,  
Sacked and pillaged the city,  
And carried away the women and the loot.

4.

[240] After hunting among the mountains,  
David came down,  
Carrying a wild sheep at the end of his spear.  
He entered Sassoun.  
Taking a rusty little knife,  
He went to the turnip field of the old widow,  
Pulled out a turnip, peeled it with the rusty knife,  
And munching it, returned to the city.  
What did he see as he entered the city?  
On other days when he came back to the city,  
He saw people chatting, jesting, laughing.  
But on that day, as he entered Sassoun,  
It seemed as if the city was buried under ashes.  
People were weeping, moaning and lamenting,  
Mothers and children had lost each other.  
David found the old widow—  
Her arms crossed over her breast,  
Weeping, moaning, swaying back and forth, and saying:  
—Ruin, ruin upon you, Sassoun!  
The only daughter I had is taken into slavery in Msr.  
Hearing this, David asked the old widow:  
—What did I hear? What has happened, Old One?  
She said: —May Krogh-death take you, David,  
You turnip-eating foolhardy Sassounite,  
May your horse-saddle remain unmounted.  
David asked: —Why are you cursing me?  
What have I done, Old One?

The old widow asked: —Who is ruling Sassoun now?  
—My uncle Vergo, said David;  
Why do you curse me, Nana,  
—Why shouldn't I curse you? said the Old One.  
We raised our daughters  
With so much suffering and heartache,

[241] Vergo came, took them away  
And shut them up in haylofts  
So that they can be sent to Msrah Melik.  
Go and see, Gosbadin is at your uncle's,  
Collecting tribute for Melik.  
Why should we pay tribute?  
David asked: -Old One, Old One,  
Who is Gosbadin? What is the tribute for?  
The old widow said: —You are asking who Gosbadin is?  
Melik has sent Gosbadin  
[Chanting:]  
To take forty short women,  
To take forty tall women,  
To take forty virgin maidens,  
To take cows and oxen,  
Forty loads of gold and silver.  
He has locked all the maidens and women  
In three big haylofts.  
Now they are measuring off the gold.

David was angered.  
He grabbed the old widow's hand and said:  
—Old One, come and show me where they are.  
The old widow showed David  
The haylofts where the short women, tall women,  
And young maidens were locked in.  
David smashed the doors of the three haylofts  
And freed the women and maidens.  
He said: —Mothers, sisters,  
Come out, go to your homes,  
Pray and give thanks for your release.  
I will put an end to your troubles.  
Then he went, opened the door of the other haylofts,  
Freed the cattle and cows, and said to them:  
—God's creatures, go back to your owners' barns.  
[242] David then took the old widow by the hand and said:  
—Old One, now show me the treasure house  
Where they are measuring off the gold.  
The old widow took him there, stood aside and said:  
—David, unless you let go my hand,  
I cannot show you where it is.  
David let go her hand.  
She said: —There it is, see, there it is.  
And she pointed to the door of the treasure house.

**(Continued on Next Page)**

# David of Sassoun

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## *David of Sassoun*

### Part I

#### *David's Fight against Msrah Melik*

(Continued from Previous Page [242])

5.

David went to the treasure house.  
He saw forty pahlevans,  
Sword in hand, sitting [guard] at the door—  
Twenty on one side and twenty on the other side.  
He greeted them and asked:  
—Will you see what my uncle is doing?  
They said: —Why do you ask?  
—He needs help, David said, I want to help him.  
The pahlevans said:  
—What has he been doing, and what will you be doing?  
David was angered over this reply.  
He laid down the wild sheep he had shot,  
And twisted off the heads of the forty pahlevans  
As if they were chickens.  
Then he picked up the wild sheep  
And went inside the treasure house.  
Entering the storeroom,  
He saw the gold piled on the floor.  
Hovan was holding the sack open,  
Vergo with a measure [pail] in his hand  
Was scooping the gold, passing it to Hovan.  
They were pouring and scooping, pouring and scooping,  
And filling sack loads for Msr.  
His uncles, perspiring heavily, were drenched in sweat.  
Looking around, David saw  
[243] Badin, Gosbadin, Soudin, Charkhadin  
Sitting around the Koursy.  
With his protruding lips one tiz wide  
And sharp, pointed whiskers,  
Gosbadin was a fierce-looking, frightful sight.  
As Uncle Vergo was measuring off the gold,  
Saying, 'two,'  
Gosbadin was saying, 'one.'

David was angry; his eyes were bloodshot.  
Hovan saw David entering,  
But poor Vergo did not.

David raised such a shout at Vergo,  
That, out of fright, Vergo lost control of his bowels.  
Seeing David behind him, he said:  
—Death take you, David,  
Your father once shouted at me and frightened me;  
Now, you shouted like him.  
Turning to Tzenov Hovan, David asked:  
—Uncle, what are you doing?  
He said: —Foolhardy David,  
We are wiping off the stains on your arm.  
—Where are the stains on my arm, Uncle?  
There are no stains, don't you see?  
Hovan said: —Look, there, over your shoulder.  
David threw down the wild sheep off his shoulder,  
Gently held Vergo's hand, and said:  
—Uncle Vergo, Uncle Hovan, you are too old,  
You cannot measure off Sassoun's gold.  
Let me do it and fill the sacks.  
If Melik wants tribute,  
I will pay that tribute.

[244] The pahlevans said: —Send that brat away; do your work.  
David said: —No, I will do the measuring.  
Tzenov Hovan said: —David, go away,  
You have nothing to do with this.  
—No, said David, I will not go. Give it to me.  
He snatched the measuring pail from his uncle's hand,  
Turned the pail upside down and said:  
—Uncle, pour, pour the gold.  
Hovan poured a shovel of gold on the bottom-up pail.  
With a stick David wiped the gold off,  
Picked up the empty pail, feigned pouring it  
Into the sack and said: —This is one-two.  
Gosbadin flew into a rage. He shouted at David:  
—What are you doing, you fool?  
Go away, I will chop your head off.  
Then he shouted:  
—Tzenov Hovan, are you playing a game?  
Have you brought this brat to laugh at us?  
You must pay the tribute of seven years.  
If you do not, I will go back and tell Melik.  
He will come, pillage and destroy Sassoun.  
David became angry; he got up, and  
Turning his head, looked at Gosbadin,  
Picked up the measuring pail, and, invoking:  
—By the Bread and Wine, the Eternal Lord,  
And High Madonna of Marout,  
He hurled the pail at Gosbadin.  
Gosbadin ducked his head. The pail hit the wall.  
If he had not dodged the blow,

The pail would have knocked his head off.  
Gosbadin got up and ran away.  
David chased him, caught him,  
Cut off his lips, pulled out his teeth  
And stuck them in rows on his forehead.  
He put him on a horse,  
[245] Tied his feet to the belly of the horse, and said to him:  
—Now, go, take greetings to your king and tell him that  
Mher's son, David, did this. Tell him also not to come again  
And take away the women and maidens of Sassoun.  
The House of Sassoun is not fallen  
So that he can come and exact tribute from us.  
Let him have Msr, we will keep Sassoun.  
If he is not satisfied, let him stop at nothing.

6.

Badin, Gosbadin, Soudin, Charkhadin,  
Beaten and helpless, deserted their soldiers  
And fled to Msr.  
Gosbadin's soldiers, carrying their plunder,  
Were out of the boundaries of Sassoun.

David mounted his horse, rode on,  
Overtook Gosbadin's soldiers and shouted to them:  
—Where are you taking these people?  
Where are you taking this plunder?  
Leave them and go away before it is too late.  
I pity you. Don't let me chop your heads off.  
They said: —You are one, we are a thousand,  
How can you stop us?  
David raised his spear, fell upon them  
And slaughtered them all.  
He freed the men, women, and maidens,  
Took the plunder back to Sassoun,  
Called the townspeople and said to them:  
—Let everyone come,  
Identify and take away his belongings.  
He who has given goods,  
Let him come and take back only his own goods.  
He who has given gold or coin,  
Let him come and take back only his own gold.  
But I will chop off the hand of anyone  
[246] Who takes more than his own, even by a millet-seed.  
Let everyone take only what he has given.

David gave back to the people  
All their goods, gold, and coin.  
Then he went home.

7.

Soudin, Charkhadin, Badin, Gosbadin,  
Terrified, reached Msr.  
The women of Msr were gathered



At a fountain to fill their water jugs.  
They saw Gosbadin with his mouth open,  
As if he was laughing.  
They said: —Gosbadin is coming back with tribute.

But as he came near to them,  
They saw that his lips were cut off,  
His teeth were pulled out and stuck on his forehead.  
The women said: —Look, Our Gosbadin!  
Look at the way he is wobbling,  
Look at the way he is slobbering whey.  
And as he came nearer to them,  
They jeered at him, saying:  
[Chanting:]  
Hey, Gosbadin, braggart Gosbadin,  
You went to Sassoun to bring booty,  
Forty tall women to load camels,  
Forty short women to grind grain,  
Forty beautiful virgin maidens,  
Forty sacks of silver and gold,  
And red milch cows  
For our butter and dry-curd.  
Where are the red cows?  
Where are your women?  
We see now you are back wobbling,  
[247] With rows of your teeth stuck on your forehead.  
You, mud-plastered braggart,  
You went away like a wild wolf,  
And you came back like a whipped dog;  
Your spear hangs from your neck  
Like a dog's whipping stick;  
Your mouth is wide open like a window,  
Spittle drools from it like the whey from a curd-bag,  
And swarms of flies are feasting on it.

Gosbadin hung his head in shame and  
Turned his horse to go the other way.  
The women saw that their men  
Had not come back with him.  
With their eyes pinned to the road,  
They shouted:  
Where did you leave our husbands?  
Gosbadin turned back and said:  
[Chanting:]  
—You jabbering shrews,  
I thought Sassoun was a land of plains,  
I did not know that it was rockbound.  
Their young lads are like demons,  
Their arrows are like the beam of an oil press,  
The blades of their grass are like spears,  
Their swords are like thunderbolts that slash a man  
And tear his carcass [open] like a window.  
Your husbands fell in battle there.  
When the rains fall in the spring,

Floods from Sassoun will bring  
The noses and ears of your husbands—  
Your butter and curd.

8.

A day or two later,  
Msrah Melik asked in his Council of State:  
[248] —Has Gosbadin not returned from Sassoun  
With loot and tribute?  
They said to Melik: —Hal! hawal!  
Yes, Gosbadin has returned to Msr.  
Melik said: —Summon him before me.  
But Gosbadin was too ashamed to appear [before Melik].

The kinsmen of the slaughtered soldiers of Gosbadin  
Gathered at Melik's gate and demanded:  
—Summon Gosbadin to Melik's court for a trial.  
Melik sent four men after Gosbadin.  
—Go, bring him here by force.  
They went and said:  
—Gosbadin, Melik commands you to come with us.  
If you do not, we will take you to him by force.  
When they took Gosbadin to Melik's presence,  
Melik saw that his teeth had been pulled out  
And stuck on his forehead.  
Melik, enraged, asked him: —What has happened to you?  
[Chanting:]  
Before you left, you boasted that you were very brave,  
You said that you would go and plunder Sassoun.  
Where are they? Let me see them:  
Forty tall women,  
Forty short women,  
Forty beautiful virgin maidens.  
What did you do in Sassoun?  
You had so many brave men,  
Where are they now?

Gosbadin replied: —Long may you live, O King!  
David faced us in Sassoun.  
[249] He ignored your order, slaughtered our soldiers  
And did not pay the tribute of seven years.  
He mutilated me and said,  
'Go, take my greetings to Msrah Melik.  
Let him come himself to collect the tribute;  
I will not pay any tribute.  
Let him have Msr; we will keep Sassoun.  
If he is not satisfied, let him do what he can.'  
David has become a very brave young man.  
There is no one as brave as he.

9.

Hearing this, Melik became furious; he saw blood.  
He went home [to his mother] and said:

—Mother, I wanted to kill David on that day,  
But you did not let me.  
Now, do you see how defiant he is?  
In vain I did what you said.  
—No, said his mother, you did not do what I said,  
You did what Gosbadin said.  
Melik asked: —What did you say that I did not do?  
His mother said: —Had you done what I told you,  
You would have gone to Sassoun  
To visit David, twice a year,  
And you would have invited him to your home,  
That would have pleased him;  
He would have thought, 'I have a brother.'  
Then no one could have spoken ill of you.  
Melik said: —But Mother, I am an Arab,  
David is an Armenian. How can he be my brother?  
—Melik, said Ismil Khatoun,  
Don't you understand?  
Many people, Arabs and Armenians, become brothers;  
They visit each other and help one another.  
David was the child we nursed and raised.  
If you had treated him well,  
[250] He would have listened to you . . .  
But you did not visit David,  
You did not invite him to your home.  
What right did you have  
To demand seven years' tribute from him?  
David did what he thought he should do. [He retaliated.]  
—Mother, said Melik,  
The things David has done to me  
Have put me to shame.  
I cannot show my face in the city.  
—Melik, said Ismil Khatoun,  
You have nothing more to do with David.  
The score is settled evenly.  
I will send a letter to David  
To reconcile him with you.  
Have nothing more to do with him.  
But would Melik be mollified? —Mother, he said,  
When I did what you said, I suffered in the end.  
Either I will kill David, or David will kill me.  
—Melik, said Ismil Khatoun, listen to me,  
You cannot kill David.  
When she said, "You cannot kill David,"  
Melik became angry,  
He stood up, took his vizier's hand:  
—Let us go, he said.

10.

Melik went to the city,  
Assembled all the wise men and sought their counsel.  
Among these men there were many  
Who did not approve of destruction;

And many others who were saying:  
—Melik, what harm has David done to you?  
He has kept the peace and has remained in his domain;  
[251] You have plundered and destroyed his land,  
You are the one who has not kept the peace.

Melik did not consult these men again,  
He sought counsel with other men, and asked them:  
—What do you advise? We are going to fight David.  
They said: —Melik, David is twenty years old now,  
He does not know how to fight.  
If you do not fight him now,  
If you do not kill him now,  
He will kill you and seize Msr when he is thirty.  
We counsel you to gather your army  
And make war on David now.  
Unless you attack him this year,  
You will not be able to do it again.

Melik shouted at the counsellors:  
—I am going to [invade] Sassoun,  
I will devastate Sassoun.  
I will scorch the land, pollute the water,  
Uproot the people, take them to a new city  
That I will build near Msr.  
The name of Sassoun no more shall be heard on earth.

[252]

## **The Duel between David and Melik**

Melik ruled over three-quarters of the world;  
One-quarter of the world only  
Remained as David's homeland.  
Melik summoned the elders of his realm;  
He had a pan set before him,  
With a razor he slit his forehead,  
The blood flowed, filled the pan;  
He took a sheet of paper  
And wrote a call to arms with his blood:  
[Chanting:]  
I issue this summons to the South,  
I issue this summons to the North,  
I issue this summons to the East,  
I issue this summons to the West,  
To all my soldiers and generals:  
All men bearing arms should come;  
War is declared;  
Come, come,  
Cross-bearers,  
Basket-heads,  
Wide-foreheads,  
Paddle-tongues,

Come, fight the infidel,  
War is declared, war!

[253] I need a thousand—thousand soldiers  
Without mustache, without beard,  
I need a thousand—thousand soldiers,  
The only sons of their mothers,  
I need a thousand—thousand soldiers  
With brown beard,  
I need a thousand—thousand soldiers  
With white beard,  
I need a thousand—thousand soldiers  
With red beard,  
I need a thousand—thousand mounted soldiers  
On white steeds; yes, on white steeds;  
I need a thousand—thousand mounted soldiers  
On chestnut steeds; yes, on chestnut steeds;  
I need a thousand—thousand mounted soldiers  
On jet black steeds; yes, on jet black steeds;  
I need a thousand—thousand trumpeters, drummers;  
Yes, trumpeters, drummers.  
Come, come, I need ten thousand—thousand infantrymen;  
Yes, infantrymen.  
Come, fight the infidel,  
War is declared, war!

In a short time Msrah Melik saw that  
Soldiers came from the four corners of his domain.  
Then Melik came forth and proclaimed:  
[Chanting:]  
—They have come—  
Brave young men have come—  
One hundred thousand;  
They have come—  
Young men with newly grown mustaches have come—  
[254] One hundred thousand;  
They have come—  
Beardless men have come—  
One hundred thousand;  
They have come—  
Trumpeters have come;  
They have come—  
Seven kings from the four corners of the earth;  
They have come—  
My brave comrades in arms.  
War is declared, Melik, war!

The cavalrymen who came were countless in number;  
Those who reached the river of Msr first,  
Drank half of its water;  
Those who came next, drank the rest of the water;  
Those who came last, licked the stones of the river bed;  
The straggling horsemen had no water to drink.  
They reached the plains of Msr, pitched their tents,

And asked Msrah Melik:

—Who is our enemy? Whom are we going to fight?

Melik answered: —The Sassounite named David.

He has killed many, many of my men.

I need your assistance; I am going to fight David.

2.

That night Ismil Khatoun had three dreams.

She could not sleep.

She went and sat at her son's bedside and said:

—Melik, my son, I beg you once more,

Do not go to fight against David;

I had a dream.

The star of Msr was dim, darkened,

[255] The star of Sassoun was shining bright.

I had another dream in which

The steed of Msr was in flight

And the steed of Sassoun was overtaking him.

I dreamed again.

The sun was shining on the land of Sassoun,

Warm and bright,

Our land of Msr was dark and foggy;

The sky was cloudy. Rain was falling.

A flood rose; its waters, turned into blood,

Carried corpses on their crest . . .

Do not go to war on David. Listen to me.

Melik said: —Be quiet, you deceiver,

You sleep for yourself and dream for me?

I am going to attack Sassoun.

—Then, if you are going, said his mother,

I am coming, too. I will not let you go alone.

—Don't come, said Melik, you are a woman.

—I will, she said. I shall not be stopped.

Ismil Khatoun gathered together

Forty dancing maidens and forty women—

Two groups of shavar players,

And two groups of zourna players;

Taking these groups, she went to Sassoun with Melik.

Melik assembled his soldiers

And rode before them on his march to Sassoun.

He reached Lerra Dasht, pitched countless tents,

And camped his army.

[256] Melik's army was so numerous that by the time

The last troops arrived, those who had come first

Had worn down the stones into sand,

And drunk the river dry.

Then Melik wrote a letter to David:

—David, you must fight with me. Come out, face me.

If you do not, I will attack your city with my army,  
Kill all its male population;  
I will set fire to Sassoun, burn it to ashes, and,  
Like a flood, I will sweep away everything,  
I will haul away the stone and soil.

They brought Melik's letter to Hovan.  
Tzenov Hovan read the letter and said:  
—Heavens! He is coming with such a big army;  
But whom is he going to fight?  
What shall we do? We have no leader, no army.  
Hovan wept. Tears rolled down his beard.  
—O merciful God, he prayed, come to our aid.

The people of Sassoun were terrified  
When they learned about the letter.  
But David had heard nothing.

3.

Tzenov Hovan took Melik's letter to Vergo.  
When Vergo heard that  
Melik had come with a large army  
And was camping [at Lerra Dasht], he said:  
—Hovan, we can never fight Melik.  
Let us bring David here, hold a feast,  
Fool him, get him drunk;  
Then let us take women, virgin maidens,  
[257] Gold and silver to Melik,  
And pass under his sword.  
Melik may have pity on us.

Tzenov Hovan held a feast.  
They brought forth  
A seven-bail caldron full of wine  
And gave David all the wine he could drink.  
Kerry Toros had come to the feast, too.  
He thought to himself:  
—David is a quick-tempered lad,  
He will fight and bring harm to himself.  
We will get him drunk and keep him home.  
He turned to David and said: —David, if you drink  
That caldron-full of wine, you are Mher's son,  
If you do not, you are a bastard.  
—Kerry, said David, fill it up.  
Kerry Toros filled the caldron to the brim.  
David picked it up  
And drank the wine to the bottom.  
The caldron fell to the ground and broke.  
David got so drunk!—He lay down and fell asleep.  
Kerry Toros then beat the drum and said:  
[Chanting:]  
—Come, come  
Kotot-motot! Beloved Kotot,  
Vuzhig Mukho,

Junjghaporig,  
Khor Manoug,  
Khor Koussan, and Jorr Virap.  
Come, come,  
This is the best of all days. Let us go.  
It may be more, it may be less than what we hoped for,  
God either favors Melik, or favors us.  
Kerry Toros took thirty-nine tents  
And the members of his household.  
[258] They rode on, reached the top of Lerra Sar  
And pitched tents.  
Kerry Toros pitched thirty-nine tents there  
And waited for the dawn.

4.

Sandoukht, Kerry's wife, was troubled.  
She thought to herself:  
—They will kill Kerry Toros,  
They will kill our sons,  
Then they will come and kill us  
And destroy our family to its roots.  
She went and sat at David's bedside and wept.

David woke up when her tears fell on his face.  
He said: —Oh, Heaven's mercy; Nana,  
I am still alive, why are you crying?  
—May Krogh strangle you, David lad, she said,  
You killed Gosbadin's soldiers;  
Now, Melik, with a huge army, has come upon us.  
Your Kerry has gone to fight him.  
Melik will kill your Kerry.  
Then he will come and kill us,  
Destroy our family to its roots,  
And take us all into slavery.

David was so disturbed that he lost his sleep,  
Sobered, stood up, took his bow and arrow,  
And said: —Have no fear, Nana,  
I will go and fight Melik myself.  
And he left...

5.

David went to Tzenov Hovan and said:  
—Uncle, give me weapons and a horse to ride;  
[259] I am going to fight Melik.  
Tzenov Hovan said:  
—Go, pick a horse from the stable  
And a sword from the armour room.  
Vergo, who was there, said mockingly,  
—David, when you kill Melik,  
Bring his ears as a gift to me.  
David became angry, but said nothing.  
He went and picked an unbroken colt from the stable



And a rusty sword from the armour room.  
He mounted the colt and started off.

Just then the old widow,  
Who owned the millet field, met him.  
She asked: —David, my lad, where are you going?  
—I am going to fight Melik.  
She laughed at him and said:  
—David, are you crazy to go to fight with those things?  
What a pity that you are Mher's son!  
David became angry and asked:  
—Old One, what can I fight with then?  
If you have a poker, or a rod, or anything else,  
Get it ready,  
I will take it when I go to fight.  
The old widow said: —David, I would die for you!  
Don't be angry. Go.  
But listen to what I have to say, then go.  
—Tell me quickly, then, Old One.

The old widow said:  
[Chanting:]  
—Didn't your father have the Lightning Sword?  
Didn't your father have Kourkig Jelaly?  
Didn't Kourkig Jelaly have shoes of steel?  
Didn't your father have a steel bit  
To put in Kourkig Jelaly's mouth?  
Didn't your father have a mother-of-pearl saddle  
[260] With golden stirrups?  
Didn't your father have a helmet for his head?  
Didn't your father have a velvet cloak?  
Didn't your father have a girdle?  
Didn't your father have a pair of trousers?  
Didn't your father have boots for his feet?  
Didn't your father have a Battle Cross  
On his right arm?  
David asked: —Old One, where are they?  
She said:  
—David, your Uncle Hovan has laid a curse on anyone  
Who tells you where your father's raiments are.  
If I tell you, the curse will fall on me.  
If you are so upset now  
When Msrah Melik is challenging you to fight,  
Go, force Hovan to give you your father's belongings.  
If he does not give them willingly,  
Take him by the neck [collar]  
And force him to give them to you.

6.

David went to his uncle,  
Grabbed him by his neck [collar], shook him hard,  
Lifted him off his feet, and said:  
[Chanting:]

—I want from you my father's Lightning Sword.  
I want from you my father's Kourkig Jelaly  
With shoes of steel.  
I want from you the bridle and the bit of steel  
To put in Kourkig Jelaly's mouth.  
I want from you the mother-of-pearl saddle  
With golden stirrups.  
I want from you my father's helmet,  
[261] I want from you my father's velvet cloak,  
I want from you my father's girdle,  
I want from you my father's trousers,  
I want from you my father's boots,  
I want from you my father's Battle Cross.  
Give them to me willingly,  
If you do not, I will take them by force.  
Tzenov Hovan said:  
—May the mouth that told you this, wither.  
You knew nothing of this, someone told it to you.  
The year your father, Mher, died,  
I hid all his gear under the doorpost.  
Let us go and take them out.

They went and took the gear out.  
David brought them home; put the garments on.  
Uncle Hovan said: —I would die for you, David,  
Your father's armour and weapons are  
In an underground room,  
Go down a flight of forty steps  
And get your father's weapons.  
If you can carry them all, you can fight;  
If you cannot carry them all, you cannot fight.

David went down to the underground room,  
Saw his father's armour and weapons hung on the wall.  
He gathered them all in his arms,  
Carried them up to his Uncle Hovan.  
When Tzenov Hovan saw this, he rejoiced and said:  
—Perhaps David will take his father's place.  
I am Mher's brother, yet I could not carry them,  
But David gathered them all and brought them up.

7.

Pleased, Tzenov Hovan said:  
—David, since the day of your father's death  
[262] I have hidden his horse in a big stable,  
Blocked the door, and fed him through the skylight.  
Fearing Melik, I have not dared to take him out.  
Tzenov Hovan took David,  
Pointed to the door at a distance and said:  
—David, that is where  
I have kept your father's horse.  
If you can, go and take him out.  
David went, broke the door and entered the stable.

At the sight of Mher's familiar gear,  
The horse was overjoyed.  
He began to neigh and prance.  
David went to the horse, held his mane,  
Caressed his eyes and patted his back.  
The horse sniffed him and wept.  
David led him out.  
As they came out of the stable,  
The horse saw that it was not Mher who led him out.  
He stamped the ground and kicked.  
Sparks flew from his hoofs.  
By God's grace, the horse began to talk:  
—Earthborn, you are made of dust,  
I will turn you into dust.  
What will you do with me?  
David said: —I will ride you.  
The horse said: —I will take you to the sun to burn.  
David said: —I will roll under and cling to your belly.  
The horse said:  
—I will carry you over the mountains and valleys  
And dash you against rocks and trees.  
David said: —I will roll up and cling to your back.  
The horse said:  
—Man, you will be my master, I will be your horse.  
David said to the horse:  
—You had no master, I will be your master,  
You had no one to curry you, I will curry you,  
You had no one to feed you, I will feed you.

[263] Then David said to Hovan:  
—Uncle, I want the mother-of-pearl saddle.  
Hovan brought the saddle. He thought to himself:  
—When Mher saddled the horse and drew the girth,  
The horse reared up, stood on his hind legs.  
If David saddles him, forces him on his hind legs,  
He can go to battle.  
If he does not, he cannot go to battle.  
David put the saddle on the horse,  
And as he drew the girth,  
The horse leaped off the ground.  
He then said:  
—Uncle, give me Mher's Battle Cross.  
Uncle Hovan said: —I cannot give it to you.  
If you are worthy, it will be placed on your arm;  
If you are not worthy, it will not be placed on your arm.  
By God's will,  
The Battle Cross descended on David's right arm.  
David mounted the horse,  
Had his father's great saz played;  
He paraded in front of his door  
And sounded his father's trumpet.  
All the people of Sassoun gathered to see him.

Tzenov Hovan looked at David longingly;  
With a heavy heart and tearful eyes he began to sing:  
[Chanting:]  
—Ah, woe to me, a thousand woes;  
Woe to me, a thousand woes for Kourkig Jelaly,  
Ah, truly for Kourkig Jelaly;  
Woe to me, a thousand woes  
For the Mother-of-Pearl Saddle,  
Ah, truly for the Mother-of-Pearl Saddle;  
Woe to me, a thousand woes for the Bit and Reins of steel,  
Ah, truly for the Bit and Reins of steel;  
[264] Woe to me, a thousand woes for the Helmet on his head,  
All, truly for the Helmet on his head;  
Woe to me, a thousand woes for the Velvet Cloak,  
Ah, truly for the Velvet Cloak;  
Woe to me, a thousand woes  
For the Girdle around his waist,  
Ah, truly for the Girdle around his waist;  
Woe to me, a thousand woes for the Boots on his feet,  
Ah, truly for the Boots on his feet;  
Woe to me, a thousand woes for the Battle Cross,  
Ah, truly for the Battle Cross.  
Tzenov Hovan did not see David,  
Who, mounted on his horse,  
Had drawn his sword to strike him.  
His uncle kept on chanting:  
—Woe to me, a thousand woes for our stalwart David,  
Ah, truly for our stalwart David;  
Woe to me, a thousand woes for the yearling  
Who is leaving our House of Sassoun.

When Hovan said: 'Woe to me for our stalwart David,'  
David said: —Uncle, be thankful for that one word ['woe'];  
If you had not said that,  
I would have chopped your head off.  
I spared you for that one word ['woe'].  
Why did you grieve over those things first, then over me?  
You should have grieved over me first,  
Then over those other things.  
Should I or the Lightning Sword be grieved over?  
Should I or the Girdle be grieved over?  
Hovan said: —David, I would die for you.  
It is for you I am weeping.  
David dismounted his horse,  
Kissed his uncle's hand, and said:  
—Uncle, bless me  
[265] To be worthy of the care you have given me.  
When Hovan heard this, he ordered  
Mher's saz played,  
Mher's drum beaten,  
Mher's trumpet sounded.  
And the newly wed brides of his household  
Came, danced, and sang for David:  
[Chanting:]

—David, may you never depart from us,  
May you ever return to us.  
May you ever return to us, our brother, David.  
To this day we have not served you as your sisters,  
We will serve you from now on, our brother, David.  
We will pour water over your hands, our brother, David.  
We will put sandals on your feet, our brother, David.  
We will serve you as your sisters, our brother, David.

9.

David quickly mounted his horse.  
He invoked God,  
Made peace with the townspeople,  
Made peace with the village folk,  
He begged forgiveness from every man and woman:  
[Chanting:]  
—Brothers, sisters, have no fear,  
By God's will, I am going to battle;  
Farewell, O sisters,  
You have been sisters to me;  
Farewell, O mothers,  
You have been mothers to me;  
Farewell, good neighbors,  
Farewell to you all, young and old.  
Good neighbors, I have plagued you many times,  
Forgive me [for my pranks].  
[266] Gentle matrons, remember David,  
When you bake your bread.  
Youthful friends, think of David, when you hold feasts,  
My sisters, my mothers, and all my good neighbors,  
Farewell!

**(Continued on Next Page)**

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# David of Sassoun

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## *David of Sassoun*

### Part I

#### *David's Fight against Msrah Melik*

(Continued from Previous Page [266])

10.

As David was bidding his farewell,  
His grandmother, Deghtzoun Dzam, ended her mourning.

Ever since Mher's death,  
Deghtzoun Dzam had been living in seclusion  
Behind seven doors.  
A servant had been taking food to her every day.  
On the day when David had Mher's saz played,  
She asked the servant who brought food to her:  
—What is going on? I hear the sound of Mher's saz.  
The servant said: —My Lady, don't you know that  
David has put on his father's garments,  
Has taken up his father's arms,  
Has mounted his father's horse, Kourkig Jelaly?  
It is his father's saz they are playing.  
He is going to battle against Msrah Melik.  
Hearing this,  
Mher's mother ended her mourning, and said:  
—My heart's desire is fulfilled. I will end my seclusion.  
She looked out of the window;  
Seeing young David mounted on Mher's horse,  
Deghtzoun Dzam called:  
—Kourkig Jelaly, mouraz,  
I would die for you.  
David was astonished. He stopped [listened].  
[267] She went on to say:  
[Chanting:]  
—Kourkig Jelaly,  
My David has no father, father him,  
My David has no mother, mother him,  
My David has no brother, brother him.  
Take my David to his father's Gatnov Aghbiur,  
There he must dismount and drink its water.  
Take my David to his father's testing-stone,  
He must strike the pillar with his sword.

Kourkig, I entrust my young David to you.  
The horse then bowed his head and said:  
—I will, grand lady.  
The grandmother then spoke to David:  
—David, your father of blessed memory  
Has shown his horse all the ways and roads.  
The horse knows what to do.  
David said: —Very well, Mamig.  
And he rode away on Kourkig Jelaly.

11.

David rode to his father's Dzovasar.  
When he left Sassoun it was so dark and misty  
That he could not see the road;  
But Kourkig flew like a homing pigeon.  
David said [to himself]: —Heavens! This is God's will.  
I will leave it to Kourkig Jelaly,  
He can go where he wills.  
Kourkig Jelaly dashed on and on  
And covered seven days' journey in one hour.  
He climbed to the top of the mountain.  
As he reached the summit, he stopped.  
He stopped at Gatnaghbiur.  
The mist cleared,  
Kourkig stamped the ground with his hoofs,  
David thought the horse would not go further;  
[268] He said: —Alas, Kourkig Jelaly,  
May you break your neck,  
I thought you would take me across rivers of blood.  
This is a drop of water, can't you take me across?  
If you do this here, what will you do in battle?  
How shall I fight Msrah Melik?  
Saying this,  
He dug the stirrups [into the flanks of the horse]  
And broke his ribs.  
The horse, enraged, said:  
—I can dash you to the sun,  
But I will not for your father's sake.  
David, angered, drew his sword  
To strike off Kourkig's neck.  
He had drawn his sword half-way  
When a blast of wind hit his forehead.  
David came to his senses;  
He heard Kourkig's voice saying:  
—This is your father's Gatnaghbiur,  
Dismount, drink its water  
And put a little of it on my ribs.  
David dismounted, kissed Kourkig on the forehead,  
Put a little water on his ribs,  
And let him free to graze in the grass.  
Then he drank the water of the spring,  
Lay down, slept, and had a rest  
While the horse stood against the sun and shaded him.

David awoke. He found that he had gained strength.  
 His father's garments would hardly fit him.  
 Kourkig Jelaly neighed, came, and stood before him.  
 David put the bit into Kourkig's mouth,  
 Mounted him and rode away in great contentment.  
 On the road he saw an iron pillar. The horse said: —David, that pillar is  
 [269] Your father's testing-stone; if you can cut it through  
 With one stroke of your sword, we will go to battle.  
 If you do not cut it through, we will not go.  
 David drew his sword, struck a single blow;  
 The Lightning Sword went through the pillar,  
 Leaving one piece atop the other [appearing unbroken].  
 David did not know that his sword had cut through.  
 He hung his head, his heart sank. He cried out:  
 [Chanting:]  
 O feet, you should have been paralyzed,  
 You should have not brought me here  
 To strike down the pillar  
 And fail with a grieving heart.  
 O hand, you should have withered,  
 Because you did not have the strength  
 To strike and knock down the pillar  
 So that my heart would not grieve.  
 O eyes, you should have been blinded  
 So that you would not have seen  
 How I failed to strike down the pillar  
 To know if I was to fight Melik.  
 Just then a wind arose and, like a hurricane,  
 Hit the iron pillar and knocked it down.  
 David then saw that  
 His sword had cut through [the iron pillar].  
 Overjoyed, he sang:  
 [Chanting:]  
 O feet, may you be ever strong,  
 In good fortune you brought me here  
 So that I could strike and knock down this pillar.  
 O hand, may you remain ever strong,  
 May you gather greater strength  
 So that I can fight Melik.  
 [270] O eyes, more light unto you  
 For seeing what I did [today].

He rode on;  
 He made peace with the rocks,  
 With the springs and the mountains;  
 He bade them farewell and sang:  
 —Farewell, farewell,  
 Cool, cool waters of Dzovasar,  
 I am going to battle; I will thirst for your water. May you long for me.  
 Farewell, farewell.  
 Cool, cool breezes of Dzovasar,



I am going to battle; I will feel the heat [of battle].  
May you remain cool.

13.

Saying this he rode on to face Msrah Melik.  
He saw that the stars in heaven could be counted,  
But the tents of the enemy could not be counted.  
He stood atop the mountain and saw that  
Melik's soldiers were more numerous  
Than the sands of the sea.  
David smote his head and said:  
[Chanting:]  
-Lord God, how shall I fight [this multitude]?  
Great is the providence of the High King!  
If they were spring lambkins,  
And I were a hungry wolf,  
I could not strangle them.  
If those tents were stacks of hay  
And I were a raging fire,  
I could not burn them.  
If they were ashes and I were a wind,  
[271] I could not blow them away.

The horse sensed that David was wavering. He said:  
[Chanting:]  
—Ey, man irresolute,  
Why are you frightened?  
My breath will slay as many as your sword can slay;  
My hoofs will trample as many as your sword can slay.  
David, do not waver, ride on!  
Do not come down from my back, do not be deceived.

These words heartened David.  
He rode on, then said to himself:  
—Wait, man! I will warn them before I attack.  
He drove up to the summit of Lerra Sar and called:  
[Chanting:]  
—Ey! You who are asleep, awake,  
You who are awake, saddle your horses,  
You who have saddled your horses, get your arms,  
You who have your arms, mount your horses.  
Say not that David stole in like a thief  
And stole away like a thief.

Warning them, he fell upon Melik's soldiers  
And slaughtered, slaughtered, and shouted:  
—Dash on, Kourkig, dash on!  
Slay, sword, slay!  
They fought and fought and slaughtered;  
The blood ran in torrents and carried away the corpses.

Kerry Toros was looking on Msrah Melik's army,  
He saw that Melik's soldiers were in panic,  
Groaning, shouting, and slaughtering one another.

He turned to the men and said:  
—On, boys, great is our God,  
Melik's soldiers are in panic;  
Come, we will attack from the lower end.  
[272] David slaughtered the enemy from the upper end,  
Kerry Toros slaughtered them from the lower end.

Among Melik's troops there was a man—  
An aged man, the father of seven sons.  
Melik had forced his sons to fight in his army.  
The old soldier said: —Woe to us, woe to us!  
Unarmed, bareheaded, he broke away  
From the ranks, shouting:  
—Make way, I am going to David  
To have a word with him and save these soldiers.  
He came, stood before David, and said:  
—David, I would die for you,  
Listen to my plea, stop your horse,  
I have something to tell you.  
—What will you tell me, Old One? asked David.  
—David, he said, I would die for you,  
Are these people not human beings, too?  
Why are you killing, slaughtering them?  
Don't they have children, wives, and homes, too?  
If you kill these men,  
The injustice to their children  
Will weigh on your conscience.  
They are poor and wretched people,  
Some are their mother's only hope,  
Some are young men, newly wed,  
Some are the sole support of their hearths,  
Some the sole flame of a vanishing household.  
—Then, why have they come to fight against me?  
The Old One replied: —Is it our fault?  
Msrah Melik brought us here by force.  
Melik is your enemy. Go, fight with him.  
—Where is Melik, now?  
—He is asleep in that green tent you see;  
A golden apple tops the tent pole,  
[273] Seven maidens fan away the flies,  
Seven other maidens massage his feet;  
The smoke rising from his tent  
Is not smoke,  
It is his breath coming out of his mouth.  
If you go and kill Melik,  
These soldiers will bless you,  
They will rejoice and go back to their homes.

David was moved by pity.  
He stopped the slaughter.  
Turning [to the old soldier], he said:  
—Halvor, you spoke well. I will do as you say.

David rode on to Melik's tent  
And stood at the entrance.  
He saw Melik huddled under a blanket inside the tent.  
Seven maidens were fanning away the flies,  
Seven maidens were massaging his feet,  
Ismil Khatoun was sitting by his side,  
And two Arabs stood guard at the entrance.  
David said to them:  
—Wake up your master, tell him to come out.  
The Arab guards said to him:  
—We cannot. He must sleep for seven days;  
Three days are over,  
He will sleep four more days before he wakes up.  
David said: —I will not wait until he wakes up.  
I am not concerned with his sleep—  
Call him quickly, tell him to come out.  
If he is not facing death, I have brought death to him;  
If he has no Krogh, I will be his Krogh,  
I will put him to a lasting sleep.

[274] They heated iron rods  
And put them against Melik's feet;  
He murmured: — Uff, maidens,  
Why have you not made my bed well?  
There are fleas in my bed; they are biting me.  
He said this and fell asleep again.  
They heated a ploughshare  
And held it against his feet;  
He said: —Uff, there are so many fleas in my bed,  
They are biting me, they do not let me sleep.  
David lost his patience, he threw his spear  
And pierced Melik's heel.  
He said: —You have slept enough, Melik, get up.  
Melik grunted: —Uff, uff,  
You don't let me regain my strength.  
He sat up, rubbed his eye with one hand,  
Rubbed the other eye with the other hand,  
Looked outside and saw David on horseback,  
Spattered with blood,  
Standing at the entrance of the tent.  
When he recognized David, Melik [with his breath]  
Blew at him, trying to blow him away.  
But David did not move.  
By blowing, Melik lost the strength of forty buffalos.  
David said: —I have come to fight with you.  
Melik laughed and said:  
—The devil take you, lisping David,  
Since when have you become a cavalier  
To come and wait at the entrance of my tent?  
Dismount, come in, rest a while,  
Let us talk; then fight.  
David said: —I will not dismount;  
Why have you forced those poor  
And wretched men to fight against me?

How can we sit and rest?  
Come out and fight with me.  
Melik's mother, Ismil Khatoun, came out and begged:  
[ 275] —David, you have travelled long, you are tired,  
Dismount, come in, and rest;  
You can start the fight later.  
She begged hard. David wanted to dismount;  
The horse shied; he did not want David to dismount.  
Melik had dug a pit forty kaz deep inside his tent,  
Topped it with an iron trap door,  
And covered it with carpets.  
He wanted David to come in, sit [on the carpets],  
And fall into the pit.

They duped David. He dismounted.  
The horse became angry, ran away  
To the summit of the mountain.  
David went in. They seated him on the pit.  
Plunk . . . ! David fell into the pit.  
He was caught by the iron trap-rings in the pit,  
And could not come out;  
The iron trap door clapped.  
Melik brought heavy millstones,  
Laid them on top of the pit, and said:  
—Was he the one to fight with me?  
Ha, ha! David has come from Sassoun  
To fight with Melik!  
Lisping David has come from Sassoun  
And wants to fight with Msrah Melik . . . Ha, ha . . . !  
Let him stay there until his bones decay. . . .

Night came, Melik went to sleep.  
David was left in the pit.  
We will leave David in the pit;  
And tell about Tzenov Hovan.

15.

That night, in a dream, Tzenov Hovan saw that  
The star of Msr was shining bright,  
[276] And the star of Sassoun was getting dim.  
He woke up and said: —Wake up, wife, wake up,  
In my dream I saw that  
The star of Msr was shining bright,  
And the star of Sassoun was getting dim.  
We have lost David.

Saryeh said: —Doom to your household!  
You sleep for yourself and dream for others?  
Hovan fell asleep.  
He dreamt again;  
The star of Msr was shining brighter,  
The star of Sassoun was failing, vanishing.  
Hovan woke up again and said: —Wake up, wife, wake up,  
I dreamt again that the star of Msr was shining brighter,

And the star of Sassoun was vanishing.  
Saryeh said: —Doom to your household!  
Man, why don't you go to sleep and let me sleep?  
Tzenov Hovan went to sleep again.  
Once more he dreamt that the star of Msr rose  
And swallowed the star of Sassoun.  
He said: —Wake up, wife; they have killed David.  
Saryeh said: —Man, why don't you go to sleep?  
Who knows in which woman's arms he is lying  
Or where he is dallying [tonight] ?  
Hovan became angry and struck his wife.  
She got up and lit a candle.  
Tzenov Hovan said to her: —Bring my gear.  
She brought his gear.  
Hovan wrapped himself with seven buffalo hides,  
Tied the hides with seven buffalo chains  
So that he would not burst when he roared.  
He put on his armour-gear, went to the stable,  
Laid his hand on the back of White Horse.

[277] The belly of White Horse sank to the ground.  
Hovan asked: —White Horse,  
How soon can you take me to David in battle?  
—By noon, replied the horse.  
Tzenov Hovan said:  
—Cursed be the feed I gave you,  
By noon it will be his corpse or his bier I will find.  
Hovan went to Chestnut Horse  
And laid his hand on his back.  
The belly of Chestnut Horse sank to the ground, too.  
Hovan asked: —Chestnut Horse,  
How soon can you take me to David in battle?  
—By sunrise, replied the horse.  
Tzenov Hovan said:  
—Cursed be the feed and care I gave you,  
What will be left of David by sunrise?  
Hovan went to Black Horse and laid his hand on his back.  
The belly of Black Horse did not sink to the ground.  
Tzenov Hovan kissed the horse on its forehead  
And asked: —Black Horse,  
How soon can you take me to David in battle?  
Black Horse replied:  
—If you can hold yourself on my back  
And put one foot in the stirrup,  
I can take you to David in battle  
Before you put the other foot in the stirrup.  
Hovan started to mount the horse;  
He put one foot in the stirrup,  
By the time his other foot reached the other stirrup,  
Black Horse took him to the top of Lerra Sar.  
[He was a fiery horse.]  
Kourkig Jelaly saw Tzenov Hovan, and,  
Neighing, came to him.  
Tzenov Hovan was alarmed; he said to himself:

—David has been killed;  
The horse has escaped and come here.  
Tzenov Hovan sent forth a call.

[278] His voice rang through the mountains and valleys:

—David, where are you?  
Invoke the High Madonna of Marout,  
Invoke the Battle Cross on your right arm,  
And hurl yourself up.  
The call went forth . . .  
Hovan's voice reached David's ears;  
—Hie, hie, he said to himself,  
My uncle has come; he is calling me.  
Invoking, 'In the name of the High Madonna of Marout  
And the Battle Cross on my right arm.'  
He hurled himself up.  
The iron chains and rings flew skyward,  
The millstones broke to bits,  
Each flying piece killed forty men.  
David stood at the mouth of the pit and shouted:  
—Msrah Melik, don't act like a coward again,  
At daybreak let us fight like men.  
Melik did not dare to go near him.  
David started to look for his horse;  
Tzenov Hovan called: —David, come here.  
Heeding the call, David went to his uncle.  
But the horse was angry, he would not go to David;  
David went to him, patted him tenderly,  
The horse was pacified. David mounted him and said:  
—Uncle, you go back to Sassoun. I am going to battle.

16.

David rode on to Melik's tent and said:  
—Melik, you deceived me once,  
What are you going to do now?  
Melik saw that David had his hand on his mace.  
Trembling with fear, he said:  
[279] —My dear David, come in, sit down.  
—I will not sit, said David, I have come to fight.  
Melik gave orders  
To have his high-spirited horse brought to him.  
He put on his armour and mounted the horse.  
Melik and David rode around the field.  
Melik asked:  
—David, shall we come to grips or take turns?  
—The choice is yours, said David.  
Melik said: —Let us take turns;  
One strikes three times,  
The other one strikes three times,  
Who shall strike first?  
David said: —You strike first, you are older.

David dismounted,  
Walked to the field, stood there, and said:  
—Melik, throw your mace.  
Melik took up his mace,  
Rode off to Farkin, and  
Dashed back [like lightning]—  
A distance of three days' journey—  
He hurled his mace at David.  
With the savage howl of a dog the mace tore the ground  
As if forty yokes of buffalos  
Had ploughed the field.  
The dust-cloud engulfed heaven and earth  
That did not settle down for a day and night.  
Melik called: —Hey, David,  
You were made of dust, I turned you into dust.  
David called back: —Melik, I am still alive,  
That was your first blow; strike again.  
Melik called back: —You home-wrecking cur,  
The span of my distance was too short.  
I could not put sufficient force in my blow.  
Saying this, he turned and rode off.

[280] He dashed to Diarbekir,  
Raced back toward David,  
And hurled his mace at him.  
With a lion's roar the mace tore the ground  
As if a flood had gouged the earth.  
The dust-cloud engulfed heaven and earth,  
Hid the sun and  
Covered David for two days and nights.  
Melik called: —David, are you still alive?  
You were made of dust, I turned you into dust.  
David called back: —Melik, I am still alive.  
That was your second blow; strike again.  
—Hie, hie, called Melik,  
The stretch of run was too short for my horse,  
My mace did not gather sufficient force.

Melik turned once more and rode off.  
He dashed to Msr,  
Raced back toward David  
And hurled his mace at him.  
The mace struck the ground  
With the thunder of a spring cloud,  
And like an earthquake tore the earth apart.  
The dust-cloud engulfed heaven and earth,  
Hid the sun and  
Covered David for three days and three nights.  
Melik said: —David is dead.  
He was made of dust, I turned him into dust.  
When the dust-cloud settled,  
David and his horse stood unharmed.

David said then: — Melik, you had your [three] turns,  
Now it is my turn.  
—You home-wrecking cur, said Melik,  
Let me try once more.  
—No, said David, where can you go now?  
It is my turn. Is the world governed by rule or by force?  
[281] Melik's mother came out and said:  
—David, Melik is your brother,  
Don't be ungrateful to him.  
—Yes, Mother, I will not be ungrateful to him.  
Melik then said: —David, I beg you,  
Give me seven hours' leave,  
Let me go and lie down in my tent,  
Then you can take your turn to strike.  
David said: —Go, lie down;  
Only tell me, Melik,  
What shall I strike you with, my sword or my mace?  
Melik thought to himself:  
—How can I ever survive,  
If he strikes me with his mace?  
He said: —David, strike with your sword.

17.

Melik went to his tent and said [to his mother]:  
—I hurled my mace three times at David;  
Nothing happened to him.  
Now he will come here and strike me.  
Melik's mother said:  
—Melik, go down into that pit.  
Melik went down into the pit.  
They covered the pit with forty buffalo hides,  
Over the hides they put forty millstones,  
And the millstones they covered with a blanket.  
Melik sat securely in the pit, thinking to himself:  
—It is David's turn now.  
David knew what he [Melik] had done.  
He came and saw the millstones  
Piled on top of the pit and covered with a blanket;  
He knew that it was not Melik's body [they had covered].  
[Seeing] Melik's mother standing there,  
David did not say: —Get Melik out, I want to see him.  
[282] David mounted Kourkig Jelaly,  
Dashed to Dzovasar,  
Drew his Lightning Sword,  
Raced back full speed to strike a blow.  
Just then Ismil Khatoun uncovered her breast,  
Ran to him, and said:  
—David, I have suckled you with tender love,  
Spare this blow for the sake of the milk I suckled you with.  
—Mother, said David,  
When Melik was hurling his mace at me,  
Why did you not beg him once  
To spare a blow for your sake?



David lowered his sword, moved it back and forth,  
Raised it to his lips, to his forehead, and said:  
—Mother, I will spare this blow for your sake.

David turned, dashed away again,  
Raced his horse back to strike his [second] blow,  
When Melik's sister ran to him, and said:  
—David, when you were young, I held you in my arms,  
Took care of you and played with you.  
Spare this blow for my sake.  
David lowered his sword, moved it back and forth,  
Raised it to his lips, to his forehead, and said:  
—This blow I will spare for your sake.  
Between God and myself I have only one blow left,  
I will either kill or fail to kill Melik.

David turned again,  
Dashed to the mountains of Sassoun and  
Raced back toward Melik.  
As he neared the pit,  
Ismil Khatoun ordered the women,  
The virgin maidens and the fiddlers:  
—Hurry, play your shavars,  
Hurry, sound your trumpets,  
Hurry, beat your drums,  
[283] Hurry, hold your Kafkirs [musical instrument] in your hands,  
Dance, dance with abandon,  
David is young. When he gets here,  
He will look at you and strike a weak blow  
That will fail to kill Melik.

The maidens came, played the shavars,  
Sounded the trumpets, beat the drums, and danced.  
But David said to himself:  
—They are doing this for me, they want to distract me.  
He invoked:  
—In the name of the High Madonna of Marout,  
In the name of the Battle Cross upon my right arm,  
And struck a blow with the Lightning Sword.

His sword cut through forty millstones,  
Cut through forty buffalo hides,  
Cleaved the monster Msrah Melik from head to foot,  
Cut through the earth seven kaz deep  
And reached the black waters.  
If an angel had not set his wings against them,  
The black waters would have risen and drowned the earth.  
Msrah Melik then called:  
—David, I am here, strike another blow.  
David called back: —Msrah Melik, shake yourself!  
Msrah Melik shook himself;  
Half of his body fell on one side,  
Half of his body fell on the other side.  
Msrah Melik was dead.

David said [to Ismil Khatoun]: —Mother,  
 Remove the cover, I want to see Melik.  
 [284] They said: —You go away; we will remove the cover.  
 David rode to the pit and removed the blanket.  
 He saw that the forty millstones  
 Had been shattered by his sword.  
 He cleared the stones and  
 Saw that the forty buffalo hides were cut to pieces.  
 Melik's mother bent over the pit  
 And called: —Melik, Melik, Melik!  
 No sound came from Melik.  
 Melik's mother and sister sat there and wept over him.  
 Ismil Khatoun then turned to David and said:  
 —David, you killed Msrah Melik,  
 No harm is done; you are my son, too.  
 Take Melik's wife,  
 Then the Kingdom of Msr will be yours.  
 Sassoun is already yours.  
 David said:  
 —I am as untainted as I was at my birth,  
 I will not join my untainted body  
 With one of tainted strain.  
 Come, if you wish, I will take you to Sassoun with me.  
 —No, David, she said,  
 I will not come to the land of Sassoun.  
 If you will not come to our land of Sassoun,  
 I will give Msr to you. Go and live there.

David turned his horse back,  
 Rode to the soldiers' camp,  
 Called together Melik's surviving  
 Soldiers and generals, and said to them:  
 —Return to the lands you have come from.  
 Go to your homes; stay there.  
 Offer prayers for me and ask mercy  
 For [the souls of] my father and mother.  
 Live in peace [with us],  
 Do not march on Sassoun again.  
 If you take up arms and make war on us,  
 [285] You will face David of Sassoun,  
 You will face the Lightning Sword,  
 Even if you hide in a pit forty kaz deep,  
 Beneath the cover of big millstones.

The soldiers blessed David;  
 Yet they could hardly believe that Melik was dead.  
 —David, they said, we would die for you.  
 God be with you wherever you go,  
 God grant you prosperity,  
 God grant you good health.  
 May your father and mother enter God's kingdom.  
 Ismil Khatoun went back to Msr with her soldiers,

The other kings, princes, and soldiers  
Went back to the four ends of the earth.  
They spoke of David's heroism wherever they went.  
They said: —David fulfilled his father's vow—  
He slew Msrah Melik and set Sassoun free.

19.

While he was fighting, Kerry Toros heard that  
David had killed Msrah Melik.  
He stopped the fighting and returned to join David.  
Then David with his Kourkig Jelaly,  
Kerry Toros and his thirty-eight warriors,  
With their horses, returned to Sassoun.  
And what did they take back from the battle?  
They took nothing but a yoke of oxen and an ox cart.  
David stuck Melik's ear at the end of his spear  
And stuck the spear on the ox cart.  
They took the ox cart to Sassoun as a gift to Vergo.

Meanwhile what was happening in Sassoun?  
[286] Tzenov Hovan had seen the huge army  
And the countless tents of the enemy;  
He had gone back to Sassoun and told the people:  
—Countless soldiers and countless tents.  
The people of Sassoun had lamented: —Woe to us,  
Woe to us; they will kill David,  
They will take our women,  
Our daughters and sons into slavery.  
Save us, O Lord God.  
The elders of the city  
Had posted watchmen on top of the cliffs  
To scan the roads and see  
Whether David or [enemy] soldiers were coming.  
If they saw a multitude of men,  
They were to warn the people of the city  
To prepare themselves for battle.

The watchmen suddenly saw a lone rider  
At the head of thirty-nine horsemen.  
They ran to the city and shouted:  
—Some riders are coming, and a man is leading them;  
We believe it is David.  
They went and told Hovan: —David is coming.  
Hovan set out to meet David. All the townspeople—  
Men, women, old men and widows, children—  
All followed him to meet David.

When David saw a big crowd moving toward him,  
He said to himself: —Heavens! What is this army?  
How many more foes do I have to fight?  
He spurred his horse and said:  
On, Kourkig, what God has ordained, is ordained . . .  
He rode on. As he got nearer, he saw  
Hovan leading the crowd—

Boys, girls, men, women, villagers, and all.  
David shouted:  
—Uncle, have you also come to fight with me?

[287] Uncle Hovan said: —David, we have come to welcome you.  
We are rejoicing and thanking God for your return.  
David asked: —Why have the women come?  
Hovan said: —David, since the day you left,  
These dejected women have been weeping,  
Calling on God for help.  
They have been fearing that Melik might kill you,  
The Arabs might come and slaughter the men,  
And take away the women.  
When they heard that you were coming, they all rejoiced;  
Young and old came out to welcome you.  
David said to them:  
—Return to your homes,  
I have killed Melik. Go back to your homes.  
Uncle Hovan then embraced David,  
Wiped his forehead, kissed him, and said:  
—We shall fear no more.  
The Sassounites then returned to their homes.

When they reached home,  
Hovan changed David's bloody garments,  
Sat him in the place of honor.  
They also washed and curried Kourkig Jelaly  
And took him to his stall.

When David took his seat, he said:  
—Give me a jug of wine.  
He drank the wine, lay down and slept for three days.  
At the end of three days, the old widow,  
The owner of the millet field, came to David  
And said: —Welcome back, David, welcome back.  
—God's bounty to you, Old One, said David.  
—Do you remember, said the old widow,  
How you were going to fight Melik  
With a rusty sword and a scrawny nag?  
Did you not see how hard it was to fight Melik?  
—Old One, said David, I am thankful to you.  
[288] Will you come and mother me? I have no mother.  
She said: —I will always be your mother, David;  
I am going to my home, but I will come  
And tell you anything you need to know.  
Fear no more, David; may you grow and flourish.  
You were young. Now you are grown up and great.  
Do not stay in this room.  
Go to Hovan and tell him,  
'Get my father's chamber ready,  
I want to go and stay in my father's chamber.'

David went to Tzenov Hovan and said:  
—Uncle, open my father's chamber,

I will go and stay in my father's chamber.  
—Yes, said Hovan, I will open the chamber.  
Until today the Light of Sassoun had grown dim,  
Now it is shining bright.  
Why should I not open your father's chamber?  
I am rejoicing over the deeds you performed.  
You are so brave!  
I feel that I own the world.  
I will rejoice,  
We all will rejoice hearing your commands.

**(Continued on Next Page)**

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# David of Sassoun

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[Page 289]

## *David of Sassoun*

### Part II

#### *David and Khantout*

[290]

#### **David's Marriage**

1.

Before David went to war,  
He was looked upon as an orphan;  
No one cared for him or paid attention to him.  
After he went to battle and returned,  
He became an important man.  
Whoever saw his soulful eyes, his rosy cheeks,  
His handsome nose and mouth,  
Fell in love with him.

One day while Tzenov Hovan was asleep,  
His wife secretly baked a cake, fried a chicken,  
Took some honey, butter, and seven-year-old wine,  
Put on her finest garments,  
Applied kohl to her eyes and arranged her locks,  
Put on her pretty shoes,  
Lit a candle, took the food,  
And went to David's chamber.  
David had locked his door and gone to sleep.  
She called: —David, get up, open the door.  
David asked: —Who are you?  
—Your Uncle Hovan's wife, she said.  
David opened the door.  
Hovan's wife went in and sat down.

[291]—David, she said, I have been longing for you.  
I could not prepare nice things for you,  
This is what I had ready to bring to you.  
She uncovered the tray, set it before him  
With a jug of wine and a cup.  
David thought to himself:  
—I have no mother, she is mothering me.

He thanked her and said:  
—You have been a mother to me,  
You have thought of me and have come to see me today.  
Hovan's wife said: —David, I would die for you,  
There never has been one, there never will be one  
As brave as you in all Sassoun.  
David ate the food, drank the wine—  
The seven-year-old pomegranate wine.  
He drank heavily, and,  
In a happy mood, said: —Let me drink,  
My uncle's wife is honoring me today.  
David kept drinking, became intoxicated.  
Put his head on the cushion, and fell asleep.  
He could not say another word.

Hovan's wife kissed David on his cheeks and forehead.  
Seeing that David was asleep  
And oblivious to everything,  
She went home while Hovan was still asleep.

For a whole week she kept going to David.  
One day she thought to herself:  
—Why do I take the seven-year-old wine to him?  
He drinks it and falls asleep;  
What pleasure do I get out of him?  
The next day she took one-year-old wine—less wine—  
Went to David's chamber,  
Placed the food and wine before him [and sat down].  
David ate the food and drank the wine.  
This time the wine did not go to his head;  
[292] He did not fall asleep.  
Hovan's wife sat on David's lap,  
Put her arm around his neck  
And tried to hug and kiss him.  
David became angry; he did not let her kiss him;  
He said: —You are like a mother to me;  
Get up and sit there, so that we can talk.  
She asked: —David, why do you put me  
In your mother's place?  
I am a stranger, married to your uncle.  
David said: —My mother and my uncle's wife are as one,  
She takes the place of my mother,  
And as my mother, she is like the sunlight for me.  
Hovan's wife said:  
—David, you do not understand, I am not related to you.  
Your uncle had me all this time,  
Now I don't want him any more, I want you!  
David then thought to himself:  
—If I hit her now and kill her,  
My uncle will accuse me that I killed his wife.  
If I don't kill her, she will keep on pestering me.  
—Wife of my uncle, David said,  
Leave me now. I wish to sleep;

I will talk to you tomorrow.  
He fooled her, sent her away.

Early next morning David went to the fountain,  
Washed his hands and face,  
Sat there and pondered.  
He saw the old widow coming.  
—Old One, come here, he said;  
He beckoned to her. She came.  
David told her all  
That Hovan's wife had said and done.  
—You are as a mother to me, Old One, he said,  
[293] That is why I am telling you.  
The old widow said: —David, I don't blame the woman,  
You were a boy once,  
Now you have reached the age of twenty;  
You are unmarried,  
Whoever sees you, goes out of her mind  
And desires to be taken by you.  
—What shall I do then, Old One? asked David.  
—Go get a wife, so that women will not annoy you.

A year went by ...  
One day Tzenov Hovan said:  
—David, you saved us from Melik,  
I am going to get a wife for you.

Hovan went and asked for the hand of Ch'm'shkig Sultan.  
She was a very beautiful pahlevan, still unmarried.  
David and Ch'm'shkig Sultan exchanged rings.

2.

After his victory over Melik,  
David's fame reached Gaboudgogh, [to the ears of]  
The King of Gaboudgogh, Vacho-Marcho,  
And his daughter, Khantout Khanum.  
Khantout was fair and very brave like David;  
The fame of her beauty was spread throughout the world.  
King Shabouh had heard of her beauty;  
He had sent emissaries to ask for her hand.  
Forty other brave men,  
Relying on their record of brave deeds,  
Had come to ask for Khantout's hand.  
They were feasting and drinking with the hope  
That she would choose one among them.  
[294] But Khantout had heard of David's fame.  
She said to herself:  
—For me it will be David, only David;  
Who are those men  
Of whom I should choose one to marry?

One day, while sitting at her window,  
Khantout saw three bards strolling on the street.  
She called to them: —Bards, will you come up?



[When they went to her,] She asked them:  
—What do you earn in a day?  
They said: —Khanum, we are bards,  
We cannot tell you how much,  
Some days we earn more, some days we earn less;  
Some days we earn one piece of silver,  
Some days we earn two pieces of silver.  
Khantout said: —Bards, go to Sassoun [for me].  
I will give each of you one silver piece a day.  
The bards were overjoyed.  
They took leave and started for Sassoun.  
Khantout asked: —Where are you going?  
The bards said: —Khantout Khanum,  
Did you not tell us to go to Sassoun and come back?  
—God's wrath on your household, said Khantout,  
I am sending you to Sassoun on a mission,  
You are not going and coming without doing anything.  
—What do you want us to do, Khanum? they asked.  
—Bards, she said, you will go to Sassoun,  
Ask for David's house; go inside and sit;  
Sing my praise to David,  
So that he will come and marry me.  
If he likes me, very well;  
If he does not, he can go where he pleases,  
[295] I will have no need of him.

The bards took leave, started on their mission,  
Arrived at the city of Sassoun.  
They asked some boys who were playing on the streets:  
—Where is David's house?  
The boys said to them:  
—Come, we will take you there.  
As they came closer, the boys saw that  
The bards were carrying planks under their arms,  
And the planks had keys.  
They touched the sazes and asked the bards:  
—What are these planks?  
As one of the boys touched the strings of a saz,  
A sound came out.  
—Ah, shouted the boys, and fell upon the bards  
To take the sazes away from their hands.  
They were saying to each other:  
—Boys, sound comes out of these planks,  
Let us see what they really are.  
Kerry Toros saw what the boys were doing.  
He came and scolded them:  
—You crazy Sassounite lads,  
These men are bards and those planks are sazes.  
Sweet sounds come out of those sazes.  
You have never seen such things before;  
Come, I will take you to our house,  
They will play, sing,  
And we will listen to them.  
Kerry Toros took the bards to his house,

Gave them food. And after they ate their food,  
He said to them: —Now play a bit for us,  
We will pay you what we can;  
Then you can go back to your homes.  
The bards said: —We have come to sing to David  
[296] The praise of Khantout Khanum.  
Kerry Toros said: —I am David,  
Let me hear you sing her -praise.  
The bards took their sazes,  
Tightened and tuned the strings  
And sang the praise of Khantout Khanum.  
When they finished their singing,  
Kerry Toros asked:  
—Bards, where is this maiden Khantout?  
They said: —In Gaboudgogh;  
She is the daughter of Vacho-Marcho.  
[Hearing this,] Kerry Toros said to the boys:  
—Beat those minstrels!  
They have come to make a fool [of David]  
And break the heart of our yearling.  
He knew that Khantout had sent  
Those bards to sing her praise to David,  
So that he would go and marry her.  
The boys beat the bards  
And broke their sazes to pieces.  
The bards ran away . . .

3.

They stopped at the head of a bridge  
At the lower end of the city,  
And talked among themselves;  
—Could it be that we were beaten  
Because we did not do what Khantout said?  
—No, brother, we did as Khantout said.  
—Are they crazy then?  
—Why did they beat us?

As they were talking,  
David was returning home,  
Carrying the game he had shot at Avak Sar.  
[297] It was dusk. Stopping at the bridgehead,  
He was listening to what the bards were saying.  
David went to them and asked:  
—Bards, what is this you are saying?  
They said: —We went to Sassoun and  
Sang to David the praise of Khantout.  
David turned the crazy Sassounite lads on us.  
They broke our sazes to pieces, beat us,  
And drove us out of the city.  
Our sazes were our only means of livelihood.  
David said: —Bards, I am the David [you wanted to meet].  
It was my Kerry [who drove you away].  
Take this money, go get your sazes repaired,

Have them strung with golden strings,  
Then come and sing to me the praise of Khantout.

The bards went, had their sazes repaired,  
And went to David's chamber.  
Then each bard in his turn  
Sang the praise of Khantout Khanum.  
The first bard with a white beard  
Took up his saz, tuned it,  
And began to sing the praise of Khantout:  
[Chanting:]

—I sing to David the praise of Khantout Khanum,  
She is tall and slender as a reed in a pond.  
I sing to David the praise of Khantout Khanum,  
Her heart is as big as the arena of Kourkig Jelaly.  
I sing to David the praise of Khantout Khanum,  
Her mouth is like a fountain of honey.  
I sing to David the praise of Khantout Khanum,  
Her teeth are like a necklace of pearls.  
I sing to David the praise of Khantout Khanum,  
Her eyes are like bowls of sparkling wine.  
I sing to David the praise of Khantout Khanum.  
[298] Then the bard with a brown beard  
Took up his saz, tuned it,  
And sang the praise of Khantout Khanum:

—I look upon Khantout Khanum;  
Her hands and feet are drawn with a quill,  
Ah, hala duco, they are drawn with a quill.  
I look upon her fingernails, tapered and polished,  
Ah, hala duco, they are tapered and polished.  
I look upon her hair in forty braids,  
Ah, hala duco, forty braids.  
I look upon her figure comely like the city tower,  
Ah, hala duco, like the city tower.  
I look upon her cheeks glowing like pomegranate wine,  
Ah, hala duco, like pomegranate wine  
I look upon the breasts [hidden] in her bosom,  
As sweet as Aleppo confections.  
Ah, hala duco, as sweet as confections.

Then the third man, the youngest minstrel,  
Took up his saz, tuned it,  
And sang the praise of Khantout Khanum:

How shall I extoll her stature?  
It is forty-kaz high, luco, and a bit more.  
How shall I extoll her eyelashes?  
They are like crane's wings, luco, and a bit more.  
How shall I extoll her broad heart?  
It is forty-kaz wide, luco, and a bit more.  
How shall I extoll her fair skin?  
It is as white as the snow one-day-old.  
It is white, luco.

[299] How shall I extoll her skin soft and tender?  
It is as soft and tender as a ball of carded cotton.  
It is soft and tender, luco.

After hearing the praise of Khantout Khanum  
That the three minstrels sang,  
David took up his saz, tuned it, and sang:

—I welcome you minstrels,  
My heart till now was as pure as milk,  
You curdled it, you congealed it.  
My heart was as impregnable as the fortress of Sassoun,  
With a pick you razed its foundation.  
My heart was as limpid as an autumn stream,  
You rendered it turbid like a spring flood.  
With your songs of praise you consumed me.  
Now, go back and win Khantout for me.

When David finished his song,  
He put down his saz and asked:  
—Minstrels, where is this Khantout Khanum  
Whose praise you sang to me?  
—In Gaboudgogh, they said,  
She is the daughter of Vacho-Marcho.  
—Minstrels, said David, go tell her  
To wait for six days,  
I will be her guest on the seventh day.  
My noontime meal I will take at Jashvan,  
For the mid-afternoon meal I will be at Bandoumah,  
And for my supper I will be with the lovely Khanum.  
He gave them a few pieces of silver,  
And bade them farewell.  
The minstrels struck their chords, 'thump, thump,'  
And took to the road.

David went home and said to his aunt:  
—Wash my clothes, I am going on a journey.  
And to his uncle he said:  
[300] —I will not marry Ch'm'shkig Sultan,  
I will go and fetch Khantout Khanum.  
His uncle said:  
—David, forty pahlevans have been waiting  
At her door for seven years,  
You will go and wait in front of her window;  
If she beckons you, enter [her palace],  
If she does not, come back.

The minstrels arrived at Gaboudgogh.  
Khantout Khanum, sitting at her window,  
Saw them coming. She asked:  
—Minstrels, did you go to Sassoun?  
—Yes, Khanum, we did, they said.  
The wrath of God upon them,  
Those Sassounites are foolhardy.  
We went to David's house to sing your praise;

They fell upon us, beat us, broke our sazes;  
We fled to the lower end of the city.  
God grant long life to David,  
He had our sazes mended. David said to us:  
—Go, tell Khantout to wait for six days,  
I will be her guest on the seventh day.  
My noontime meal I will take at Jashvan,  
For the mid-afternoon meal I will be at Bandoumah,  
And for my supper I will be with the lovely Khanum.

Khantout counted up the earnings of the minstrels;  
She paid them for the number of days they were away.  
The minstrels then left, went to their homes.

4.

As he had told the minstrels,  
Six days later, David went to his chamber,  
[301] Took his garments out of the clothes-chest, put them on,  
And girdled himself with the Lightning Sword;  
Then he led Kourkig Jelaly out of his stall,  
Bridled and saddled him, and rode away.  
From Sassoun to Jashvan it is seven days' journey;  
From Jashvan to the bridge of Bandoumah  
It is another seven days' journey.  
David rode on, he reached Jashvan in the forenoon;  
At midday he was at the bridge of Bandoumah  
Where he saw men from Kordzoth  
Ploughing the field with seven ploughs.  
They were about to eat their midday meal.  
David greeted them: —Good luck, ploughmen!  
—Lord's bounty to you! they said in return,  
Welcome, brother wayfarer;  
Come, rest a while, and share our meal with us.  
—No, said David, I must ride on,  
Let the boys have the food;  
If I eat the food, nothing will be left for them.  
The ploughman said:  
—The world is sustained by the fruit of the plough.  
David rode to the rim of the field,  
Dismounted Kourkig Jelaly, unbridled him,  
And left him there.  
He went and sat down,  
Leaning against the wheel of the ox cart.  
The ploughmen had a large pot of pilaff  
That they set before him.  
Two loaves of bread made one morsel for David;  
With five morsel-scoops he finished the pot of pilaff.  
They had set before him  
Their ration of food and water  
That was to last the seven ploughmen for seven days;  
David ate and drank everything,  
[302] Leaving not even a crumb.  
As he started to leave,

The ploughmen said to each other:  
—What are we going to do now? We are hungry—  
That wayfarer ate our seven days' ration of food.  
We have six more days to work,  
There is no one to bring us food. What are we to do?  
If we send for food, they will say to us,  
'You have been out only for half a day,  
You could not finish your rations.  
If we tell them we had a guest, they will not believe us;  
If we tell them the buffalo ate it,  
They will not believe that either.  
Hearing this, David asked:  
—Which field are you going to plough now?  
—That field, there, they replied.  
David said to them: —You sit here for a while,  
I will plough in one hour  
What you will plough in six days.  
Saying this, David stood up,  
Tied the seven ploughs together,  
Hitched them to Kourkig Jelaly,  
And rode back and forth  
Ten times, the stretch of the field,  
Until the entire field was black  
[From the upturned earth].  
The ploughmen said to David:  
—You did not do that, it was your horse that did it.  
David dismounted then,  
Took the hitching chains and started ploughing;  
He kept ploughing until he had finished the field.  
The ploughmen gaped in astonishment.  
The head ploughman asked: —Wayfarer,  
Could you be the David of Sassoun people talk about?  
David said: —I am that David of Sassoun.  
[303] They said:  
—David, in all the world there has never been one  
As brave as you,  
And there never will be one as brave as you.  
Wherever you go,  
May your feet never stumble over a stone.  
May God spare you days of ill-fortune.

David left the ploughmen,  
Bridled the horse and rode on.  
—Gaboudgogh, where are you? ... I am coming.  
On his way, David had to pass  
By the window of Ch'm'shkig Sultan.  
Seeing him, she came out, stopped him, and said:  
—David, come in, you will be my guest today.  
—No, said David, do not hold me back.  
—I know, she said, you are going after Khantout,  
But she is not worth the tip of my little finger.  
Ch'm'shkig Sultan beguiled David. He went in.  
They ate, drank, and went to bed.

In the morning David regretted what he had done.  
—What did I do . . . ? he said to himself,  
No man of my race should have been fooled.  
Why did I let a woman beguile me?  
He mounted his horse and rode away.  
Ch'm'shkig Sultan called after him: —You wait!  
You came to me, deceived me, left me . . .  
And she became David's enemy.

5.

Six days passed.  
In early morning [on the seventh day]  
Khantout Khanum came, sat at the window,  
[304] And watched the road for David.  
Suddenly she saw  
Sparks flashing between heaven and earth;  
A horseman, hardly visible,  
Was dashing through space.  
She said: —That horseman could be no one but David.  
Khantout said to the gate-keeper:  
—Korkiz, there comes a horseman;  
Close the gate before he gets in.  
Korkiz rushed to close the gate.  
She had not finished her word,  
When David reached the door,  
Dashed through and rode on to her window.  
Khantout was very pleased when she saw David.  
Overjoyed, she threw an apple to him;  
David caught the apple while on his horse.  
He, too, was pleased  
[That she threw the apple to him.]  
David looked at Khantout and saw that  
The minstrels had not sung half the praise  
They should have sung.  
Riding on, he saw a man standing behind the gate  
With a mace in his hand.  
David thought to himself:  
—Since the day of my birth, I have not saluted a man;  
If I salute him now, the thought of it  
Will cause me pain, will torture me and destroy me;  
If I do not salute him,  
That pahlevan will kill me.  
He saluted him with misgiving and entered.  
Korkiz acknowledged his salute.  
David said:  
—Since the day I was born,  
I had not saluted any man;  
Today I saw Korkiz  
[305] And saluted him with misgiving, luco, with misgiving.  
Korkiz said:  
—I have been a gate-keeper for forty years,  
Yet I have not acknowledged the greeting of any man.  
I saw David today,

And with misgiving acknowledged his greeting.  
David asked him:  
—Korkiz, what is that ball in your hand?  
David snatched the mace and hurled it into the sky.  
The mace is still going . . .  
Korkiz asked: —David, why have you come here?  
David said: —I have come for Khantout Khanum;  
How can I see her?  
Korkiz said:  
—Every Friday she comes to the royal garden  
With her forty serving maids.  
Today it is Friday, we will go there, you will see her.  
Then Korkiz asked:  
—When you marry Khantout Khanum,  
Will you have me as your groomsman?  
David said: —I will;  
We will then be godson David, groomsman Korkiz.

David then rode into the garden of Khantout Khanum.  
He let his horse free  
To graze on the basil plants and roses,  
While he lay down beside the pool of immortality.  
At midday, when the sun was high,  
Khantout Khanum came with her forty serving maids;  
She saw that David had let his horse loose  
To graze on the basil plants and roses in the garden,  
While he had fallen asleep beside the pool.  
Khantout then said:  
—What an unthoughtful man David is!  
[306] Go, tell him, if he is that kind of a man,  
He must get up and go away.  
Give him some food to eat,  
Then tell him Khantout Khanum said  
He must go away.  
They brought food to David. He ate it.  
The servants told him then: —Our Khantout Khanum said,  
David must get up and go away.  
Who gave him permission to come to the garden  
And let his horse loose  
To graze on basil plants and roses and trample them;  
Is this his father's pasture land?  
The snake on its belly, the bird on its wings  
Have not been able to get into this garden,  
How does he dare enter here  
And let his horse loose to graze?  
He must get up and go away.  
Woe to him, if he does not;  
The pahlevans will fall on him and  
Leave his ear as the largest piece of his body.  
David said: —Why did you not tell me this  
Before I ate your food?  
You told me after I finished eating.  
Now that I have eaten your food, I will not go away;  
Let them do to me whatever they can.



The servants went and told Khantout Khanum:  
—This is what David said.

When the servants went away,  
David asked Khantout's stable man:  
—Where can I put my horse?  
The stable man said:  
—The horses of the forty pahlevans  
Are kept in the stable,  
You can take your horse there, too.  
[307] David then opened the stable door,  
Took the bit out of Kourkig's mouth,  
Left him among the horses and said:  
—If you overpower these horses,  
I will overpower their masters.  
Kourkig Jelaly snorted,  
He took the feed of the forty horses to his bin,  
Piled it, pressed it against the wall,  
And ate it all up.  
The hostlers went and told Khantout Khanum:  
—Kourkig Jelaly showed his prowess,  
Let us see what his master will do.

6.

When Khantout threw an apple to David,  
The forty pahlevans who had been waiting for seven years  
Were enraged. They said:  
—We have been here for seven years,  
And she has not given us any sign of recognition,  
But no sooner than turnip-eating David of Sassoun came,  
Without even greeting him, she threw an apple to him  
While [he was still] on his horse.  
David went to see the forty pahlevans,  
Who were making merry, drinking wine—  
Compared with David, they looked like boys.  
When they saw him, they trembled with fear  
And said to each other:  
—We will get him drunk and kill him.  
If we do not, he will blast our hopes.  
No woman like Khantout  
Will overlook David and choose one of us.

They seated David amongst themselves  
And brought seven-year-old pomegranate wine to drink.  
Each pahlevan offered him a cup of wine,  
Saying: —Welcome, David,  
[308] Drink to Khantout Khanum's health.  
David said to them: —Show me the keg of wine,  
I will go, take a drink, then have some food  
To clear the dust from my throat.  
Wine in cups will not even wet a man's mouth.  
I am not a sparrow to be served with water.  
Is a camel given water with a spoon?

They brought him another cup,  
It was as big as a tub!  
David started to drink the wine with that cup,  
Became jolly and drunk,  
Unbalanced and off his guard,  
Flushed and bare-headed.

As he was drunk, David would droop his head,  
Then would raise it and sit straight.  
When the pahlevans saw this,  
They drew their swords, moved on to kill him.  
Watching David from the gate, Korkiz shouted:  
—Godson David, godson David,  
A fly is buzzing over you, move your head!  
The pahlevans hid their swords.  
But David was not seeing or hearing anything.  
When Khantout Khanum, watching David,  
Saw that he was [still] drooping his head,  
She went and took a large bag of hazel nuts  
To the yerdik [skylight].  
Each time David drooped his head  
And the warriors drew their swords  
[309] To strike off David's head,  
Khantout dropped a handful of nuts through the yerdik.  
The nuts hit the tray, made such a rattle that  
The noise would startle David. He would raise his head;  
And the pahlevans, trembling with fear,  
Would put down their swords.  
Khantout kept dropping the nuts on the tray  
Until the bag was empty.  
David came out of his stupor. He said to the servant:  
—Take this spread away [and sweep the crumbs],  
It is a sin to step on bread.  
As the servant started to take the spread away,  
The pahlevans said: —Let the spread stay,  
Go, bring more food, so that we can eat, too.  
This they said so that they could hide their swords  
Under the spread.  
David said: —Take away the spread!  
He picked it up, handed it over, and said:  
—At the end of a meal the spread is picked up;  
After the spread is picked up, no meal is served.  
Then David saw an unsheathed sword  
In front of each pahlevan.  
He asked:  
—What are those in front of you?  
—Our swords, they said.  
Give them to me, let me see them, said David.  
They gathered all the swords and gave them to him.  
David looked at them and said:  
—These would make good picks for girls  
To dig up artichokes in the spring.  
He took the swords  
And broke them across his knee

As if they were a handful of matchsticks.  
He bent the broken blades, and said:  
[310] —Korkiz, put these in my saddle bags,  
They are made of good steel-iron,  
My horse will need shoes and nails,  
I will have them made from these pieces—  
There will be enough to last a year.  
When the pahlevans saw what David did,  
They got up and ran out of the room.  
David then called: —Groomsman Korkiz, let us go in,  
The house is for us, the yard is for the chickens.

7.

Khantout Khanum preferred David  
To the pahlevans [who were there to woo her].  
She said: —Ask David to come up;  
Serve food to the forty pahlevans outside.  
David went to Khantout's chamber;  
When he saw Khantout,  
He could not resist the temptation—  
Being young and rash,  
He embraced her ardently,  
Threw his arm around her neck, kissed her forehead;  
He was not satisfied.  
Again he kissed her cheeks,  
Even that left him unsatisfied;  
Then he reached for her breast, trying to kiss it,  
When with her fist Khantout struck  
Such a hard blow to his nose that  
Blood gushed out of his mouth and nose,  
Like a stream of water. She said:  
—You are your father's pride,  
I am my father's pride;  
I let you kiss my forehead  
[311] For the journey you undertook to come to me;  
I let you kiss my cheeks  
For your youthfulness. That was your right.  
But by what right did you try to kiss my breast?

David was angered. He left Khantout,  
Went to Korkiz and said:  
—Korkiz, get my horse out.  
Korkiz took out Kourkig Jelaly.  
David mounted his horse and rode off.  
Khantout Khanum ran after him,  
Wept and begged him [to turn back].  
David paid no attention.  
Khantout Khanum kept on;  
She dropped her slippers, ran barefooted,  
Cutting her toes and feet;  
She kept running barefooted,  
Tearing, slashing her feet;  
Her soles, blistered, began to bleed,

The ground was being drenched with blood  
At every step she took.  
David kept riding and listening to Khantout,  
She was calling and calling:  
—David, stop! David!  
Wait for me!  
Look behind, see my plight, then ride on.  
David looked behind and saw Khantout Khanum  
Running after him barefooted—  
Khantout, who, to this day,  
Had never taken a step barefooted,  
Now was running in the field with bleeding feet.  
Khantout kept calling:  
—Do not carry my suffering on your conscience.  
Turn, let us go back.  
David, *dnashen* [home-builder], how quickly you took offense!  
[312] David said: —I undertook this journey from Sassoun  
Because of you.  
When I kissed your cheeks once,  
You struck me with your fist;  
I should get angry.  
Khantout said: —I vow, I will follow you barefooted  
As long as I live.  
David relented. Turned back.  
He and Khantout returned to her home.

8.

Shabouh, the King of Ajem [Persians]  
Wrote to the Bab of Franks:  
—I hear that a man, named David,  
Coming from Sassoun,  
Wants to take by force  
The beautiful maiden Khantout of Gaboudgogh.  
Bab of Franks summoned his vizier,  
Deputies, and said to them:  
—Read the letter from the Shah  
And tell me what he has written.  
They read the letter, learned what he had written.  
Bab of Franks then wrote to David:  
—David, we have learned that  
You are a very powerful man.  
We challenge you to come out and fight.  
If you do not,  
Our army will invade, devastate your land,  
Plunder and carry away everything.  
[313] They brought the letter,  
Handed it to Khantout's servant,  
Who handed it to Khantout.  
She read the letter and asked:  
—Who brought this letter?  
—Two men, the servant said.  
—Take the two men to our dining hall,  
Khantout said, entertain them well.

The servant did as he was told.  
Later on, at daybreak, Khantout wrote a letter:  
—We have done no harm to you,  
We have not even heard your name,  
Nor have we any knowledge of you.  
If you come to fight, do not come alone,  
You cannot defeat David;  
Bring another king to help you fight David.

Khantout sealed the letter,  
Handed it to her servant, and said:  
—Give this letter to those two men,  
Give each a good change of clothes, ten pieces of gold,  
And two horses to ride and go away.  
The servant did as he was told.  
The two men blessed Khantout,  
Bowed to her, and said:  
—We came by foot, we return on horseback.  
Khantout did not tell David  
What was written in the letter.  
The two men took the letter,  
Carried it to Bab of Franks, their king.  
The king summoned his vizier, deputies;  
They read the letter and were amazed.  
—What a powerful man David must be! they said,  
Let us send word  
To the six kings,  
[314] Who are the enemies of Khantout's father.  
They sent word to the six kings;  
They also sent a letter to David,  
Saying: —David, we are on our way.

They brought the letter to David,  
He gave it to Khantout.  
Khantout read the letter and said to David:  
—This is the second letter we received.  
They had written once before.  
It is a king, Bab of Franks,  
Who has written to you.  
He is challenging you to a fight.  
I did not tell you about the letter  
That came before, said Khantout.  
I wrote to him without your knowledge,  
'If you are coming, come with another king,  
You cannot fight David alone.'  
I wrote this to frighten him,  
So that he would not come and fight you;  
But as you see, he is not frightened.  
He is coming with his army determined to fight.

**(Continued on Next Page)**

# David of Sassoun

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## *David of Sassoun*

### Part II

#### *David and Khantout*

(Continued from Previous Page [314])

9.

One morning, just before sunrise,  
They saw that all the enemies of Khantout's father  
Had laid siege to his city and pitched tents  
As numerous as the stars in heaven.  
Bab of Franks had camped his army  
In the land of Khantout's father,  
To capture and carry away Khantout Khanum.

King Shabouh of Ajem had camped his army  
In the land of Khantout's father,  
To capture and carry away Khantout Khanum.

[315] The king of China had camped his army  
In the land of Khantout's father,  
To capture and carry away Khantout Khanum.

The Black King had camped his army  
In the land of Khantout's father,  
To capture and carry away Khantout Khanum.

Oghan-Doghan had camped their armies  
In the land of Khantout's father,  
To capture and carry away Khantout Khanum.

The king of Aleppo had camped his army  
In the land of Khantout's father,  
To capture and carry away Khantout Khanum.

King Landband had camped his army  
In the land of Khantout's father.  
To capture and carry away Khantout Khanum.

The forty pahlevans said to each other:  
—We will not get into this fight;  
We have waited for seven years  
And have not seen Khantout's face;

David came only yesterday,  
He has already seen her and feasted with her.  
Let him go and fight.

Next morning Khantout asked them:  
—Which one of you will go to fight?  
The forty pahlevans replied:  
—Which one of us is going to fight?  
The one to whom you gave the apple—  
[316] He should go to fight.  
But if you want us to fight, ask us; we will fight.

David heard what they said.  
—This fight is my fight, he said.  
I am going to [this] fight [alone].  
He took leave of Khantout and said:  
—I am going to battle . . .  
If I return after three days, I have won;  
If I do not return, I must have been killed.  
Come, look for me among the dead,  
Take my body and bury it.  
You will know me through my mark—  
The Battle Cross on my right arm.

When David went to get Kourkig Jelaly out,  
Khantout said:  
—Oh, I forgot to get the horse out.  
She ran after David and said:  
—Wait, David! wait!  
Let me go and get the horse out for you.  
David stood aside,  
Khantout went inside the stable  
Where she saw the forty horses  
Huddled in the far corner, not daring to move;  
While David's horse stood like a rock in the stable.  
Khantout reached out to Kourkig's neck  
To lead him out. The horse looked,  
Did not recognize her, would not let her touch him.  
He jerked his head so quickly that  
She fell on the ground.  
—Ah, David, she cried, your horse is killing me.  
David ran in, took Khantout in his arms,  
And scolded the horse:  
—Hey, Kourkig, God's wrath on you!  
Does anyone strike a woman?  
Did you not see that she is a woman?  
[317] —Khantout, take him out now, David said.  
—Do you intend to have your horse kill me?  
—No, said David, he will not mind it now, take him out;  
He thought you were a stranger.  
She went, reached out to him to lead him out.  
The horse yielded. Khantout put the saddle on,  
David fastened the saddle girths,  
Mounted Kourkig Jelaly,

Shouted, "Hi!"; flew over the wall,  
Reached the battlefield.

10.

Standing on a high rock,  
David looked down and saw a multitude of men,  
As numerous as trees in a forest.  
They had pitched so many tents on the plain.  
David said: —I will alert them and attack them.  
He shouted:  
[Chanting:]  
—Ey, all ye who are asleep, awake,  
Ah, awake;  
All ye who are awake, saddle your horses,  
Ah, saddle your horses;  
All ye who have saddled your horses, mount them,  
Ah, mount them;  
Say not, 'David stole in like a thief, stole away like a thief.'

He spurred on Kourkig Jelaly,  
Straightened himself on the saddle and invoked:  
—O High Madonna of Marout,  
O Battle Cross on my right arm,  
Help me to strike right, to strike left,  
And cut down the enemy.  
And he fell on the tents, began to strike.

As hailstones fall  
[318] On a field of ripened grain, and destroy,  
So fell David on the soldiers and mowed them down.  
When King Shabouh saw David,  
He fell into a rage, howled like a wolf,  
And ordered his men:  
—Up, get ready to fight, man your positions!  
His soldiers started to fight.  
David turned on Shabouh and  
With his Lightning Sword cut off his head.  
The soldiers, seized by terror, could not move.  
Then he fell on the others,  
Captured the Kings Oghan-Doghan,  
Cut off their heads one by one,  
And left them there.

That evening he returned to Khantout.  
Early next morning he went to fight again;  
But no one dared to face him.

11.

The enemies held council.  
They sent the King of Aleppo  
To Tzenov Hovan in Sassoun. The king said to Hovan:  
—We have heard that  
There are brave pahlevans in Sassoun,



We are fighting a very powerful man;  
Send one of your pahlevans to fight and kill him.  
We will give you seven cities.

Tz'rran Vergo had a son  
Whose name was Baron Asdghig [Little Star].  
Baron Asdghig mounted his horse,  
Dashed through the sky and reached the battleground.  
David recognized him.

[319] That night he said:

—Khantout, I am not going to fight tomorrow.

Khantout said to him:

—If you are not ashamed, I will go to fight.

David said: —Swear to me that,

When I go to fight, you will not go out,

You will not open the door,

You will not open the window;

Then I will go to fight [if you swear to that].

Khantout said:

—I will not go out,

I will lock my door,

Stay in my room,

And do my needlework.

At daybreak David went to fight.

He fought Baron Asdghig until midday.

Clashing swords sent flashes of light

Through the windows.

Khantout Khanum suddenly saw

A flash of light in her room,

—What is this? she said. I do not know.

No clouds in the sky; it isn't raining,

It isn't night time. There is no lightning.

She became impatient,

Opened the window and looked around.

She saw a man on a fiery horse

Moving around David,

Brandishing a Havlouny sword,

And showering fire on his head.

Khantout Khanum was well versed in the occult.

She looked in her book and learned that

[320] The man whom David was fighting was his uncle's son.

Each time Baron Asdghig brandished his sword,

Sparks flew over David's head and fell into an abyss;

David was not returning the blows.

Khantout Khanum then cried out:

[Chanting:]

—Uncle, welcome, thousand welcomes to you.

You showered fire over our David's head,

You showered fire over our David's head,

And brought ill-fortune to Khantout.

David heard her voice and said:

—Ah, doom to you, woman!

I knew you would not stay in.

In great anger, David aimed his arrow  
At the belly of Baron Asdghig's horse;  
The arrow pierced the horse's belly  
And came out through Asdghig's head.  
Baron Asdghig fell to the ground and moaned:  
—Alas, it was a kinsman's arrow that felled me.  
He had not recognized David.  
David said: —I should be blinded!  
It is our custom that when a man is dying,  
His head should rest on a kinsman's knee  
Until his soul passes unto God.  
David put Baron Asdghig's head on his knee  
And held him until his soul departed.  
Overcome by grief over Baron Asdghig's death,  
David fainted away.  
His enemies closed in, tried to seize him.  
Kourkig Jelaly, standing by his master,  
Did not let them come near him.  
He stood watch until David regained consciousness,  
Stood up, mounted his horse,  
And fell upon the enemy soldiers,  
Who began to run away.  
David called after them:  
—Don't run away,

[321] Tell me where your king is.  
The soldiers stopped their flight.  
One of them said to David:  
—Bab of Franks is our king,  
He has escaped to his city.  
David turned his horse,  
Rode to the city of Bab of Franks,  
Sent a messenger to tell him:  
—Come out, I want to see you.  
The king came out.  
When he saw David,  
He became terrified and tried to run away.  
David chased after him,  
Caught him and cut his head off.  
He set up a new king  
Over the people who were left in the city.  
He killed the high officials  
And replaced them with people of lesser rank,  
Saying to them:  
—Do not start any wars while you are in power.  
When you are in trouble,  
Send for me. I will come to your aid.  
The entire city pledged then:  
—David, we will obey you until our death.  
David then returned to the men on the battlefield  
And said to them: —Go back to your cities,  
I have killed your king.

David did not return to Khantout in the morning.  
She thought David may have been killed.  
Her heart was filled with anguish.  
In the morning she put on a man's garment,  
Took her lance, mounted her horse,  
[And rode away,] saying:  
—I am going to find David's body,  
[322] Bring it back and bury it.

She went and began her search among the dead.  
Whenever she saw a corpse larger than the others,  
She lifted it with her lance,  
Held it against the sun and  
Looked for the sign of the Cross on the [right] arm.  
Suddenly she saw among the corpses  
Someone moving toward her.  
It was David who had finished  
The slaughter of the enemy and was coming [toward her].  
He saw Khantout Khanum  
Lifting the bodies with her lance  
And looking at their arms.  
David called out: —Ey, what are you looking for?  
Whom are you after?  
It is three days since I have killed these men;  
If you are looking for a man, I am a man.  
Khantout looked and looked. She thought to herself:  
—The horse is David's, but who is the man?  
He does not resemble David.  
Khantout said: —Stop your blabbing,  
It is beyond your strength to kill the man I am looking for.  
I would sacrifice twenty like you and ten like me  
For his fingernail.  
If I find his corpse,  
To me [the dead body] will be worth more  
Than you [alive].  
David said:  
—If that is what you think, we will fight.  
They started to fight.  
Clouds of dust hung over the field,  
The ground was furrowed by the hoofs of the horses;  
They fought long, but could not down one another.  
David fought halfheartedly—  
[323] But Khantout [in earnest] was hitting to kill.  
Suddenly she raised her mace  
To strike a blow at David.  
David held up his shield [against her blow].  
Khantout started to run away,  
David spurred Kourkig Jelaly,  
Straightened himself on the saddle, invoked:  
—By the Bread and Wine and the Eternal Lord,  
And swung his mace to strike,  
When Khantout loosened her hair [beneath the helmet],  
Jumped from her horse and fell to the ground.

David dashed after Khantout [overtook her],  
Lifted her up, threw her to the ground,  
Held her down with his knees on her breast,  
When she cried:  
—Oh, warrior, don't kill me, I am a woman.  
David said: —I know you are a woman,  
This is to pay you back for that day . . .  
Do you remember how you struck me with your fist  
And how blood streamed from my mouth?  
Khantout asked: —David, is this really you?  
—Yes, Khantout, it is I, replied David.  
—If you really are David,  
Release me then, said Khantout.  
You saw that I chose none of the forty pahlevans  
Who had been waiting for me for seven years.  
I chose you the day you came to my home.  
David, let me up!  
I will be your wife, you will be my husband.  
David released her.  
Together they went home.  
On the way Khantout said:  
—David, let me tell you a story.  
Two or three years ago  
They took me to a prince, the son of a king.  
They put me in a room,  
[324] The prince came in,  
We wrestled playfully,  
I grabbed his arm, the arm came off.  
I thought to myself, 'He is the son of a king,  
He does not have to go to plough or sow,  
An armless prince will do for me, too.'  
Then I reached for the other arm,  
That arm came off, too; his back was broken,  
He gasped and died.  
Then I realized how strong I was.  
The king then said, 'This bride is a murderess.'  
They sent me back to my home.  
When I returned to my father's home, I made a vow that  
I would [only] marry the man who could down me.  
Today we fought; you threw me down.  
From now on I am your wife, you are my husband,  
Take me wherever you wish.

13.

When they reached home Khantout called the servants,  
Who came and took Kourkig Jelaly [to the stable]  
And washed David's blood-stained clothes.

David and Khantout sat down,  
Ate and drank, then went to sleep . . .

After three days,  
David and Khantout took their horses,

Mounted them and together rode on toward Sassoun.  
When they reached Khlat,  
They had to pass by the window of Ch'm'shkig Sultan.  
Ch'm'shkig Sultan saw David,  
Came to him, and said:  
—Lisping David, you vowed to marry me.  
We exchanged rings,  
But you left me and took Khantout instead;  
[325] Why? Was I not beautiful?  
You rejected me,  
Went and took Khantout.  
Now you and I must fight.  
If I kill you, Khantout and I will both be widowed,  
If you kill me, then you can go to Khantout's bed.  
David said:  
—Ch'm'shkig Sultan, I have a lady with me,  
I beg you to let me go home now.  
At the end of seven days,  
I will come back and we will fight.  
Ch'm'shkig Sultan said:  
—Then, swear by the High Madonna of Marout  
And the Battle Cross on your right arm  
That at the end of seven days  
You will come to fight with me.  
David said: —In the name of the High Madonna of Marout  
And the Battle Cross on my right arm,  
I will come to fight with you  
At the end of seven days.  
He then took Khantout Khanum and rode on to Sassoun.  
When they reached Sassoun,  
They brought seven troupes of minstrels  
And held a wedding feast for seven days and seven nights.  
David and Khantout were married.  
[All Sassoun,] Old and young ate, drank, and made merry.  
When David shared Khantout Khanum's bed,  
He forgot the vow  
That he had taken on the Battle Cross.

[326]

## **Death of David**

1.

One day David said:  
—Khantout, since the day I brought you with me,  
My conscience has been heavy with a sense of guilt  
For taking you away from those forty pahlevans.  
I have heard that  
There are many beautiful maidens in Gurjistan [Georgia].  
I am going to find those forty pahlevans  
And marry them to forty virgin maidens  
Of their choice.  
Then I will come back to Sassoun.

Khantout Khanum said:  
—David, you are bound to me.  
You took me away from my father and mother  
And brought me to this city.  
Are you leaving me and going away now?  
What am I to do when I bear you a child?  
David said: —Khantout Khanum,  
If the child is a boy, name him Mher;  
My father's name shall not be forgotten.  
He gave her a golden armband  
Encrusted with precious gems,  
And said: —If the child is a boy,  
Tie this armband around his right arm;  
If it is a girl, give it to her for her dowry.  
[327] And if I am away too long, send Mher after me;  
I will know him when I see the armband.

David mounted Kourkig Jelaly and rode away.  
One by one he found the forty pahlevans  
In forty countries  
And took them all to Gurjistan.  
They arrived at the [main] city of Gurjistan  
Where he found a maiden for every pahlevan.  
David then went to Aderbejan.  
There he saw a maiden more beautiful  
Than any maiden he had seen.  
He said: —I will take her to Khantout as a serving-maid.  
He took her with him.  
Then David said:  
—Each man to his own god,  
And each man to his own country.  
I will go to [my own land] Sassoun.  
The pahlevans took their maidens,  
Bowed to David and said:  
—We thank you, David,  
For giving us our hearts' desire.  
They bade farewell and rode away.  
David, too, took the maiden,  
Put her on the croup of his horse and rode to Sassoun.  
Now let us relate about Khantout Khanum.

2.

When David went to Gurjistan,  
Vacho sent for Khantout and  
Had her brought to Gaboudgogh.  
Khantout was pregnant.  
When her time was fulfilled, she gave birth to a son.  
[328] Vacho said to Khantout:  
—If this child is David's son,  
He will prove it through his strength.  
They swaddled the child, tied him  
With plough chains instead of strips of cloth.  
As he cried and tossed about in the cradle,

He broke the chains to pieces.  
—Eh, a child of David and Khantout  
Could not be a weakling!  
They realized that he was an Aznantzordy.  
But when they bathed the child,  
They saw that one hand was tightly locked.  
They tried to open it by every means;  
The boy's hand would not open.  
People of the whole city tried; could not open it.  
Vacho was alarmed.  
He wrote to David's uncle:  
—Light unto your eyes, Toros,  
A son is born to David,  
But one hand of the child is locked.  
On reading this letter,  
Toros mounted his horse, the six-footed Lazky,  
And went to Gaboudgogh.  
He went to Vacho's house and said:  
—Let me have the swaddled child,  
I want to see what kind of a boy he is.  
He took the child,  
Massaged his hand, the fingers opened.  
Toros saw a drop of blood in the palm of the hand.  
—Hi, hi, he said, only a rock will contain him,  
The earth will not be able to hold him.  
He has reduced the world to a drop of blood  
And is holding it in his hand.  
If this child lives, he will do wonderful things.  
After two or three days,  
Khantout had the child baptized  
And named him Mher,  
[329] In a day Mher grew as much as  
Other children grew in a year;  
In an hour he grew as much as others grew in a month.

After staying [at Gaboudgogh] for a length of time,  
Kerry Toros took Mher, Khantout Khanum,  
And went [back] to Sassoun.

At the end of a year  
Mher took a stroll in the city;  
A mighty river was flowing outside of Sassoun.  
Mher built a six-arched bridge across the river.  
When people would walk across the bridge,  
Mher would go and beat them, saying:  
—Sons of dogs, I am the one who built this bridge.  
Did I build it for you?  
Why are you crossing my bridge?  
People then would turn back and ford the river.  
Mher then would go and beat them, saying:  
—Sons of dogs, I built a bridge,  
And I built it for you.  
Why are you fording the river?  
If you are drowned, I will get the blame.

People complained to Kerry Toros;  
And Kerry Toros reasoned with Mher  
[Not to taunt the townspeople].

3.

Seven years went by. David did not return.  
Mher [one day] asked his mother:  
—Mother, where is my father?  
Children say to me,  
"You have no father, you are a bastard."  
—Have I no father? Where is he gone?  
[330] I want to go after him.  
Khantout said: —David is your father,  
He is gone to Gurjistan  
To marry off forty pahlevans. [He will return.]  
He gave me a golden armband so that  
When I gave birth to a son I would put it on his arm  
And send him to meet his father.  
Mher said: —I will go and find my father.  
Khantout then put the armband on Mher's arm  
And pointed out the road to Gurjistan.

Mher went to the stable, took a horse,  
Armed himself, mounted and rode away.

When he reached the plain, he saw a brown-bearded man  
On horseback with a maiden seated on the croup.  
The horseman was coming toward him.  
Mher called out: — Ey, Old One,  
Is it becoming to a bearded man like you  
To have such a young maiden?  
You must give that maiden to me.  
David said: —Boy, you are an underling,  
If it is becoming to you, why not to me?  
Mher said: —It is becoming to me,  
Because I am unmarried, she is unmarried.  
David tried to pass him by;  
Mher reached out and said:  
—I will not let you have her.  
I will take her away from you.  
David was angered, he said:  
—Hi, ho, hi-ho, see [what's happening to me]!  
[Chanting:]  
I have been through many a sea  
Without wetting my horse's hoofs,  
Now I have come to a little rill  
That will not let me pass;  
I have roamed over many hills and mountains,  
[331] No one has dared to block my path;  
Here I face a tiny stripling  
Who is challenging me.  
When David finished, Mher said:  
—Am I the little rill?



Am I the tiny stripling?  
Get down, you and I will fight.  
David dismounted and said:  
—Wait, I will take this maiden out of the way,  
Then you and I will fight.  
—Take her away, said Mher.  
David took the maiden to a hilltop and came back.  
He and Mher came to grips.  
They fought so hard  
That the dust rose and clouded the sky,  
Their sweat, pouring down,  
Turned the ground into mud and mire.  
The blows of their maces raised a breeze  
[So strong] That it blew David's handkerchief  
Right to Khantout's door.

Khantout Khanum came out, looked around  
And saw that dust had engulfed the earth.  
She saw a handkerchief,  
Picked it up, recognized its scent, and said:  
—Ah, this is David's handkerchief.  
She heard rumblings in the plain,  
Mounted her horse, rode down,  
And saw a cloud of dust rising to the sky.  
Like two mountains coming to a clash,  
David and Mher were battering each other;  
They were drenched in blood,  
No one could go near to them.  
Khantout Khanum then called out:  
[Chanting:]  
—David, do not strike, David, do not strike  
Our young and only child.  
[332] David was not striking hard,  
He was only holding his own  
And striking Mher halfheartedly.  
Mher said to Khantout:  
—Have no fear, mother,  
His blows are like the breeze of Dzovasar  
Brushing my hair.

Again Khantout Khanum called out:  
[Chanting:]  
—Mher, do not strike, Mher, do not strike,  
Our brown-bearded David.

But Mher did not hear her.  
Khantout Khanum called out again:  
[Chanting:]  
—O hills, come to my aid,  
O valleys, come to my aid.  
And separate father from son.

Do hills and valleys come to one's aid?  
Hills and valleys never come to one's aid.

Khantout cried out again:  
[Chanting:]  
—O blessed, merciful God,  
Thou who dost command,  
Send down angel Gabriel  
To separate father from son.

By God's command the angel Gabriel came down,  
Intervened and set father and son apart  
As someone separates two fighting cocks.  
David then said:  
—Lad, if you had killed me,  
How would you be able to escape my avenging son?  
Mher asked: —Who is your brave son?  
David said: —My son is the one  
[333] Who wears a golden armband on his arm.  
Mher looked at his arm  
And saw the golden armband.  
He wept, took David's hand, kissed it, and said:  
—Are you my father? I have sinned against you.  
David said:  
—Mher, you disgraced me by fighting with me;  
I invoke God the merciful,  
May you have no death, no offspring!

Hearing David's curse,  
Mher became angry, went to Gaboudgogh,  
Gathered forty young men,  
Forty young women,  
And drank with them seven-year-old pomegranate wine.

4.

David took Khantout Khanum and  
The maiden home to Sassoun.  
Being blood-stained from the fight with Mher,  
David said: —Khantout, bring some water,  
I want to wash myself.  
When he took off his garments,  
Khantout saw that the Battle Cross upon his arm  
Had turned as black as coal.  
She was frightened, began to weep.  
David asked: —Wife, why are you frightened?  
Why are you weeping?  
Khantout said: —The Battle Cross on your right arm  
Has turned black like a lump of burnt bread.  
David said: —Khantout Khanum,  
Mher's blows did not hit me,  
It was the Battle Cross that struck me.  
Wife, I am going to Ch'm'shkgig Sultan.  
My vow for seven days  
Has not been fulfilled for seven years.  
[334] I am forsworn, I am going.  
Saying this, David girded his Lightning Sword,

Mounted Kourkig Jelaly, and rode away.  
He reached the palace of Ch'm'shkgig Sultan.  
Seeing David at her gate, Ch'm'shkgig Sultan said:  
—David, you took an oath to come back in seven days,  
Seven days became seven years.  
I stayed unmarried and waited for you.  
David said: —Prepare yourself and come out;  
We will fight.  
Ch'm'shkgig Sultan said:  
—Give me an hour  
To put on my armour and take my weapons.  
David tied Kourkig Jelaly  
At Ch'm'shkgig Sultan's gate, and said:  
—Let my horse stay here;  
While you are dressing,  
I will go to the river for a swim.

David took off his clothes,  
Went into the river to swim.  
The river bank was thick with reeds.  
While Ch'm'shkgig Sultan was getting ready,  
Her daughter took a bow and arrow,  
Came and hid herself among the reeds.  
While David was swimming,  
The maiden stealthily shot at David  
With a poisoned arrow.  
The arrow pierced his ribs  
And came out through his heart.  
From the pain David screamed  
Like the bellow of seven buffalos.  
His voice was heard in Sassoun.  
Kerry Toros, hearing David's voice,  
Called out: —Hurry, boys, David has been shot.  
Kerry Toros, Tzenov Hovan, Junjghaporig,  
Khor Manoug, Khor Kousan came at his call.  
[335] Tzenov Hovan called out from Sassoun:  
—David, we are coming . . .  
They went to his aid.

When they reached the river bank,  
Kerry Toros asked David:  
—Who shot you, lad?  
—I do not know, said David,  
It was someone hiding among the reeds.

They searched and found among the reeds  
A maiden with glassy [frozen] eyes—  
She had died of fright when David had screamed.  
The maiden was the daughter of Ch'm'shkgig Sultan.  
Hearing this, David said:  
That worm who destroyed me came out of me;  
It was my offspring who killed me.  
Saying this, David died—  
May his sun be granted to your sons.

Upon David's death, Kourkig Jelaly went wild,  
Broke his rein tied to the tree, ran amuck,  
Trampled to death every man,  
Animal, and horse on his path,  
Until he reached Khantout Khanum's door;  
There he stopped.  
Khantout came out and saw the horse without his master.  
She knew that something had happened to David.

5.

Kerry Toros said:  
—Boys, bring David's body,  
Let us set it upright on a horse,  
And ride home at a gallop;  
[336] Khantout then will not know that David is dead.

But Khantout had gone up  
To the roof of the house  
That was built on a high rock.  
She was looking around to see  
If David was coming back alive or dead.  
She saw men, on horseback, riding at a gallop  
With David, motionless, on another horse.  
She knew then that David was dead.  
Khantout Khanum [cried then and] lamented:  
[Chanting:]  
—The worthy came,  
The unworthy came,  
But my valiant David did not come.

Tzurran Vergo, the cad, was on the roof, too;  
He came to Khantout and said:  
—David died without a fight.  
He is dead. Take me for your delight.  
You will be without valiant David,  
But you will not be without a husband.  
Khantout turned and said:  
—The light of the day shall be denied to me from now on;  
I will not stay on this earth without David.

Khantout then climbed to the top of the turret  
And threw herself down on the rocks.  
Her head hit the rock, made a deep dent;  
People of Sassoun use this hollow as a mortar  
To pound seven measures of millet.  
Two fountains now gush where her breasts hit the rock.  
Seven pillars stand there now,  
Replacing her seven braids;  
And to this day  
The mortar stands in front of the fortress.  
[337] They came and found Khantout Khanum dead.  
Their grief was twofold.  
Kerry Toros asked:  
—Who told her [about David]?

—That cad, Vergo, they said.  
—You dog, said Toros,  
Why didn't you wait until we came?

David and Khantout were wrapped in shrouds,  
Bound together and put in a single coffin.  
With forty vardapets, forty priests, forty deacons,  
And with all the people of Sassoun lamenting,  
They took David and Khantout to Dzovasar,  
Held solemn mass, and  
Buried them in the Monastery of Marout,  
And remained in mourning for seven days.  
They died. May the Lord have mercy on their souls;  
And you, dear listeners, long may you live.

**(Continued on Next Page)**

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# David of Sassoun

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[Page 341]

## *Pokr Mher*

### Part I

#### *Pokr Mher Avenges the Death of David*

[342]

1.

I pray for mercy on Pokr Mher,  
I pray for mercy on Kohar Khanum,  
I pray for mercy on Tzenov Hovan,  
I pray for mercy on Kerry Toros,  
I pray for mercy on David of Seven-Lineage.  
From lineage to lineage we come to Pokr Mher.

2.

[342] When David died—  
May his sun be granted to your sons—  
His son, Mher, was at Gaboudgogh.  
He had not heard of his father's death.  
With forty young men and  
Forty young women he was drinking  
Seven-year-old pomegranate wine and making merry.

Time passed.  
Kerry Toros, thinking over [their situation],  
Said: —Tzenov Hovan,  
Ch'm'shkig Sultan will come,  
Pillage and devastate Sassoun.  
Let us go and bring back David's son, Mher.  
He will avenge the death of his father,  
He will rule Sassoun, and head the Chochantz Doun [House of Grandees].

He took with him Tzenov Hovan, seven buffalo hides,  
And went to Gaboudgogh.  
They asked the keeper [of the palace gate]:  
—The son of our brother and sister-in-law is here.  
Where is he?  
—He is dead, the keeper said—  
They had taken Mher behind seven doors,  
Keeping him under guard,  
Blowing trumpets, and beating drums,  
So that he would not hear the voice of his uncles  
And come out.

Mher, like a fort,  
Had been holding back enemy kings—  
Not letting them set foot in Gaboudgogh.  
Kerry Toros said:  
—We know how to identify our dead kinsmen.  
[344] If a member of our household dies at one year of age,  
His grave will be ten Alep-Kaz long.  
If he dies at two years of age,  
His grave will be twenty Alep-Kaz long—  
With every year the size of his grave  
Increases ten kazes [in length].  
We can identify the tomb of our kin.

They went to the graveyard  
But found no tomb in the size of their kinsmen.  
Tzenov Hovan said:  
—Wrap the buffalo hides around me,  
So that I can send out a call.  
They wrapped seven buffalo hides around him  
And went [took him] to a hilltop.  
Tzenov Hovan then sent out a call:  
[Chanting:]  
—Mher, lad, drink!  
Mher, lad, drink the pomegranate wine;  
Your father has been killed;  
We have been mourning him for seven days.

Mher heard Hovan's voice.  
Louder and louder they blew the trumpets  
And beat the drums.  
Mher shouted to the minstrels:  
—Stop that noise! I heard the voice of my kinsman:  
[Chanting:]  
—A voice was coming, I do not know from where,  
From the east or from the west?  
From the north or from the south?

Uncle Hovan called back:  
[Chanting:]  
—It is from the north,  
[345] It is from the south,  
It is from the west,  
It is from the east;  
Your father has been killed,  
We have been mourning him for seven days.  
—Your father's death is unavenged,  
Come with us to avenge his death.  
You are one of the warriors of the House of Sassoun.

The minstrels played their drums  
And trumpets louder and louder.  
Mher said: —I am going out;  
It is my uncle calling.  
As he started to leave, the guard said:

—That is not the call of your kinsman,  
It is the noise of the trumpets and the voice of the boys.  
But when Mher heard the call three times,  
He kicked and broke down the first door,  
Then the next door and one after the other,  
Until he broke down the seven doors and came out.

As Mher came toward them,  
Kerry Toros said:  
—Hovan, let me put him to a test;  
If he is David's son, I will take him to Sassoun;  
If he is not, I will shoot him,  
And we can return to Sassoun.  
As Mher came to him,  
Kerry Toros asked:  
—Where are you going so haughtily, lad?  
Mher said: —Two men were calling me,  
Where did they go?  
Toros asked: —Who are you that people should call you?  
[346] You are only a boy.  
Mher said: —If you are a man, why can't I be a man?  
Kerry Toros said: —I would throw my mace at you, lad,  
But you are only a boy; throw yours at me first;  
I will throw mine after.  
When Mher hurled his mace at him,  
Kerry Toros spurred his six-footed Lazky.  
Mher missed him.  
The mace passed under the belly of the horse.  
Kerry Toros stopped, swung his mace, and said:  
—On guard, lad. I am throwing my mace.  
As Toros threw his mace,  
It pinned Mher's leg to the saddle of the horse.  
As Kerry Toros drew out the mace,  
Mher did not even whimper.  
Then he asked Mher:  
—Tell me, lad, who is your father?  
Who is your mother?  
I think you are a bastard.  
When I hit with my mace, rocks break into bits;  
You didn't even whimper.  
Mher replied: —You are the bastard.  
David is my father,  
Khantout is my mother.  
They recognized each other then.  
Not seeing his father with them,  
Mher asked where he was.  
Tzenov Hovan said:  
—Your father has been killed, your mother is dead;  
Any moment Ch'm'shkig Sultan may come  
And pillage, devastate Sassoun.

Mher wept and fell on his face.  
As he fell, his uncles ran to his aid,  
But could not lift him up.



His tears flowed for three days,  
[347] Turned the ground into a bog.  
At the end of three days, Mher arose and lamented:  
[Chanting:]

—Oh, eyes, you should have gone blind,  
You should not have been the eyes of an orphaned child,  
You should have rejoiced seeing  
The helmet on my father's head.

Oh, eyes, you should have gone blind,  
You should not have been the eyes of an orphaned child,  
You should have rejoiced seeing  
The girdle around my father's waist.

Oh, eyes, you should have gone blind,  
You should not have been the eyes of an orphaned child,  
You should have rejoiced seeing  
My father's Lightning Sword.

Oh, eyes, you should have gone blind,  
You should not have been the eyes of an orphaned child,  
You should have rejoiced seeing  
My father's coat of mail.

Oh, eyes, you should have gone blind,  
You should not have been the eyes of an orphaned child,  
You should have rejoiced seeing  
My father's boots on his feet.

Oh, eyes, you should have gone blind,  
You should not have been the eyes of an orphaned child,  
You should have rejoiced seeing  
My father's Kourkig Jelaly.

Mher [stopped his lamenting,] mounted his horse,  
And with Kerry Toros and Uncle Hovan  
Set out for Sassoun.

3.

[348] On the road to Sassoun  
There was a monastery called Madghavank.  
[Neighboring] kings, enemies of David,  
Had heard that, on his way to Sassoun,  
Mher would take the monastery road.  
They had gone to the abbot and said:  
—Send word to us  
As soon as you see Mher coming this way.  
They were conspiring to ambush and kill Mher.  
As they came near the monastery toward evening,  
Kerry Toros suddenly stopped—  
He was riding ahead, Hovan and Mher were following him.  
Seeing his uncle stop, Mher asked:  
—Why did you stop, Uncle?  
Toros said: —They have blocked the road with huge logs

So that our enemies can overtake and capture us.  
The abbot had set the snare, so that,  
By moving the timbers away,  
Mher would become exhausted and  
Stop at the monastery to rest.  
The enemies would attack him then.  
Mher asked: —How can we clear the road?  
Kerry Toros replied: —If David were here,  
I would raise these logs with my spear  
And he would carry them away.  
Mher said: —Kerry, you lift them,  
I will carry them away.  
Toros then raised a huge log with his spear,  
And said to Mher: —Take this and carry it away.  
Mher put his arms around the huge log,  
Carried it to the edge of the ravine  
And with his foot pushed it down the precipice.  
One by one they removed the logs

[349] And cleared the road before nightfall.  
Then they went to the monastery.  
The abbot gave them a big room, and food to eat,  
While he secretly sent word to their enemies.  
Mher, Tzenov Hovan, and Kerry Toros  
Ate their evening meal and went to sleep.  
Kerry Toros woke up at daybreak.  
Looking outside,  
He saw that the armies of the seven kings  
Had surrounded the monastery.  
Seeing the encamped enemy, he shouted to Mher:  
—Mher, get up, look outside,  
The armies of the seven kings  
Have surrounded the monastery.  
Mher woke up, rubbed his eyes;  
Tzenov Hovan woke up, too;  
Together they came to the window and looked outside—  
The trees in a forest could be counted,  
But the soldiers of the seven kings could not be counted.  
Among them they saw the abbot.  
Mher said: —I am going out, you follow me.  
Mher mounted his horse and rode forth . . .  
His uncles also saddled their horses and rode after him.  
Mher fell upon the enemy soldiers,  
Dealt them heavy blows right and left,  
Mowed them down and scattered them like the wind  
That blows away swarms of gnats.  
Seeing this,  
Toros and Hovan were aroused to join the fight.  
Each pulled up a plane tree  
And fell upon the enemy.

Seeing them, Mher asked:  
—What are you doing, fighting with trees?  
They said: —We are doing nothing, lad,  
While you are spreading the sheaves of wheat  
On the threshing floor,  
[350] We are rounding up the stray stalks.

After they destroyed the last of the enemy,  
They captured the abbot and brought him to the monastery.  
With one hand Mher lifted the heavy lintel of the door,  
With the other hand he grabbed the abbot by the hair,  
Put his head under the lintel  
And dropped the lintel on the head. Then he said:  
—This monastery shall no longer be called Madghavank,  
It shall be called Madnavank,  
For the treachery that the abbot plotted.

Mher, Kerry Toros, Tzenov Hovan,  
Then rode on to Sassoun.

4.

When they reached Sassoun, Tzenov Hovan brought out  
The armour and arms of the House of Sassoun;  
He also brought out Kourkig Jelaly, and said:  
—Son, take this armour and arms,  
Gird yourself with them and ride the horse.  
Of the warriors of the House of Sassoun  
You are the only one left.  
Whom shall I save these for?

Mher then put on  
David's Coat of Mail,  
The Velvet Cloak, the Boots from Arzroum,  
Girded himself with the Lightning Sword,  
Took in his hand the warrior's Spear, and  
Hung the mighty Mace on his arm;  
Placed the steel bit into Kourkig Jelaly's mouth,  
And the Saddle of Mother-of-Pearl on his back.  
[351] As he led Kourkig Jelaly out to mount him,  
Kourkig spoke:  
—Ey, arrogant lad, who are you to ride me?  
Do you dare to ride me?  
Mher replied: —Kourkig Jelaly, don't be so recalcitrant,  
I am one of the braves of the House of Sassoun, too.  
Kourkig Jelaly said:  
—For David's sake  
I will not resent what you said; mount me.  
Mher mounted Kourkig Jelaly  
And asked his uncles to lead the way.  
He went [with them] to fight Ch'm'shkgig Sultan.  
Tzenov Hovan said: —What am I to do?  
Mher is a boy, he does not know [what he is facing],  
And I am old, can fight no more.  
Mher said: —Uncle, we are of the House of Sassoun,

Are we not?  
Enemy kings would not dare to come near our grave  
Even when we are dead.  
Ride on! Let us get into our fight.  
Kourkig Jelaly spoke then:  
—Why are you afraid, you faithless man?  
I will trample to death thrice as many soldiers as these.  
What do they amount to? I will slaughter them  
With my tail, my hoofs, and my breath.  
They set out, reached the city [of Ch'm'shkig Sultan].  
Mher asked:  
—Uncle, do you want to attack the city or the army?  
They thought about it and said:  
—We are not strong enough to capture  
And destroy the city.  
Mher said to them:  
—You each weigh twice as much as I,  
I will send you both to one front,

[352] And alone I will take the other front; do you agree?  
Tzenov Hovan, Kerry Toros said:  
—We will attack the city. And they set out.  
Mher drew the Lightning Sword  
And fell upon the soldiers.  
He struck right, he struck left;  
He spared neither soldier, nor officer.  
He slaughtered them all, and said:  
—This [I did] to avenge my father.  
Mher seized Ch'm'shkig Sultan,  
Tied her hair to Kourkig Jelaly's tail.  
The horse left a piece of her body in many lands.  
Only her hair was left tied to his tail.  
Mher then said: —I will go and see  
What my Kerry and uncle have done.

He went and found the city destroyed,  
Except for one cat  
That had perched on the spire of a minaret  
And was looking around.  
Mher pulled up a plane tree and  
Knocked the cat off the spire.  
Then he climbed to the summit of [Mount] Nemruth;  
Looking around, he saw smoke rising.  
He came back, went to the city  
And found an old witch huddled in a corner  
Among the ruins, kindling a fire.

Mher and his uncles asked her:  
—Why are you sending up smoke?  
The witch said: —So that you will not say,  
'We destroyed Khlat so completely that  
No smoke could rise from any chimney.'  
Mher seized the witch, [bent down two trees,]  
Tied one of her feet to the top of one tree

[353] And the other foot to the top of the other tree  
And then let both trees go.  
Thus he destroyed Khlát.  
—I have avenged my father's death, said Mher.  
The three together returned home.

**(Continued on Next Page)**

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# David of Sassoun

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[Page 355]

## *Pokr Mher*

### Part II

#### *The Marriage of Pokr Mher, and His End*

[356]

1.

Time passed . . . [one day]  
Mher said: —Uncle,  
I am going to roam the world;  
I cannot stay here;  
There is no heir for me, no death for me.

He took his Lightning Sword,  
Mounted Korkig Jelaly and rode away.  
He rode on and on,  
And found himself in a forest thick with trees.  
Mher could not pass through.  
He cut down the trees and rode on till dawn;  
He came across a big rock.  
Mher wanted to go on,  
But the rock blocked his path.  
Just then he saw a fox starting to run.  
He chased the fox to the top of the mountain.  
There he looked around and saw the capital of a kingdom.  
He rode on ...  
Until he came to a lonely cave  
Where he stopped to rest.  
A running gazelle, with its tongue hanging,  
Suddenly caught his eye.  
Mher drew his bow and arrow,  
Shot and killed the gazelle.  
As he looked around,  
He saw a group of twenty men riding toward him.  
They were cursing and saying:  
—How does the son of foolhardy David of Sassoun  
Dare to kill the gazelle belonging to our king!  
Hearing this, Mher became angry,  
Started to chase them.  
Seeing Mher [so angered],  
The men turned back their horses and fled.

[357] Mher rode on and on,  
Until he came near to the city of King Bajig;  
He dismounted and pitched his tent.  
Word reached King Bajig that  
Mher of Sassoun had come  
And had pitched his tent outside the city.  
King Bajig took with him his vizier,  
Ministers and counsellors,  
Came to Mher and said to him:  
—At the time your father was fighting Msrah Melik,  
He and I took a vow.  
—What was the vow? asked Mher.  
The king said: —We vowed that,  
When I have a daughter and your father has a son,  
My daughter will be given to his son;  
God gave a son, you, to David,  
And gave a daughter to me.  
Will you take my daughter?  
Mher said: —If I like the maiden, I will take her;  
If I do not like the maiden, I will not take her.  
They went to see the maiden,  
Her name was Kohar Khanum;  
When Mher saw the maiden, he liked her,  
And the maiden liked Mher.

2.

The following morning  
Kohar Khanum looked out of her window  
And saw Mher asleep in a tent  
With his legs stretched out uncovered.  
Kohar pitied him and thought to herself:  
—Mher will get sunstroke.  
She put on a crimson suit, girded her weapons,  
Mounted her chestnut stallion, rode out to Mher's tent,  
[358] And said:  
—Mher, the sun is striking you.  
—What can I do? said Mher, the tent is too small.  
—The tent is not small, said Kohar, it is big,  
But you are an Aznahour.  
Mher said: —Let me sleep . . .  
Kohar said: —I am the king's son.  
I want to test your strength;  
You must fight with me.  
If you win, I will give you  
My sister, Kohar, at sunrise.  
If you do not win, I will cut your head off.  
Mher mounted his horse, rode to the field.  
Kohar rode to the field. They faced each other.  
When Mher threw his mace, Kohar caught it;  
When Kohar threw her mace, Mher caught it.  
Neither side won.  
Kohar said: —Mher, let us stop,  
We have tired out the animals.

Go to your tent and rest;  
I will send you food and drink.  
Kohar left Mher, she went and roasted a lamb;  
With a servant carrying a pelt-bag of wine,  
Some bread and the roasted lamb,  
She came to the entrance of Mher's tent.  
Mher ate the food, drank the wine,  
Lay down, and slept till morning.

At sunrise, Kohar put on a black garment,  
Girded her weapons  
And rode back to Mher.  
At the entrance of his tent she asked:  
—Are you Mher, David's son?  
—Yes, I am, said Mher.  
—Are you the one who has come  
To take my sister, Kohar?  
—Yes, I am, said Mher.

[359] —I will put you to a test, said Kohar;  
If you win, I will give you my sister, Kohar,  
You can take her in the morning.  
If I win, I will cut your head off.  
—What is the test? asked Mher.  
—We will shoot an arrow  
Through your ring, said Kohar.  
The one who does not shoot through the ring  
Loses the match.  
Mher's ring was big enough  
For an arrow to pass through.  
They placed the ring as a target;  
Kohar shot first.  
Her arrow passed through the ring without moving it.  
Now it was Mher's turn.  
As Mher took aim,  
Kohar came and stood before him.  
Mher glanced at her; she was so beautiful,  
His eyes lingered on her face;  
He shot an arrow, off the ring flew,  
Mher's arrow did not pass through.  
Kohar raised her mace then and said:  
—Our terms are still the same,  
I will strike your head off!  
Mher said:  
—No, you distracted me by standing before me;  
As I glanced at your face [I missed my aim],  
My arrow only hit the ring.  
Kohar set the target again, and said:  
—Mher, if you shoot through the ring this time,  
I will keep my word  
And give you my sister, Kohar,  
But if you miss, I will strike your head off.  
Mher took aim, shot the arrow through.  
[360] Kohar then said:



—Mher, you are worthy to become Kohar's husband,  
But I say again, be careful,  
Don't let the sun strike you.  
She went, sent another tent with a servant;  
—Pitch it to cover Mher's feet, she had said.  
Mher realized then that it was not the son of the king,  
It was Kohar herself [who had tested him].  
A few days later, Mher and Kohar were wedded.  
For seven days and seven nights  
They held a wedding feast,  
Ate, drank, and made merry.  
Mher went to Kohar's bed at night;  
She laid a sword between Mher and herself.  
—The King of the West is collecting  
A tax from us, she said;  
If you can put an end to that,  
I will be your wife, you will be my husband.  
They went to sleep. In the morning  
Mher mounted his horse and rode away.  
He reached the capital of the western king.  
The king's men were terrified  
When they saw Mher mounted on his horse,  
Looking like a mountain on a mountain.  
Gathering their army, they came to fight him.  
Mher spurred on Kourkig Jelaly;  
Together they fell on the king's soldiers  
And slaughtered them . . .  
They slaughtered them until nightfall.  
At nightfall Mher turned back his horse,  
Returned home to Kohar.  
—I have slaughtered the King of the West, he said,  
No one will collect any tax from your father again.

3.

[361] Time passed.  
Tzenov Hovan sent word to Mher.  
He wrote: —Mher, the brazen grandsons of Gosbad  
Are getting hostile, threatening Sassoun;  
I am not strong enough to fight them,  
Make haste, come to our help.  
Mher said:  
—Kohar, take my mace, hang it on the door;  
If pahlevans come, they will not molest you,  
They will say, 'Mher is at home, asleep.'

Then he rode on to Sassoun.  
He was overcome with emotion; he wept.  
It was evening.  
His uncle had locked the doors and gone to sleep.  
Mher called:  
[Chanting:]  
—Fatherly Uncle, awake,  
Awake from your sweet slumber, ah, awake!

His uncle heard a voice in his sleep, and said:  
—A clear voice came to my ear  
And awoke me from my deep sleep.  
His wife said: —What voice, man?  
This is the House of Sassoun,  
You have locked the gates, are you still afraid?  
Hovan said: —Yes, I am afraid.  
I am aged, my kinsmen are away from me.

Mher then went to the rooftop and called:  
[Chanting:]  
—Fatherly Uncle, awake, I have left my home behind,  
[362] I have left my mace behind to guard my home,  
I have entrusted my mace to the daughter of King Bajig.

Uncle Hovan hurried out,  
Kissed Mher on his forehead, and asked:  
—How did you leave your home behind to come here?  
Who is guarding it?  
Mher said: —Only God and His angel know that  
I have left home.  
Hovan said: —You have hung your mace on your door;  
How can it be identified?  
Mher said: —There is a large jewel on the mace  
That throws off a dazzling light under the sun.  
[Seeing that light,] No one will dare to force my door.  
At night, he said, they burn wax candles.  
Their dazzling light will ward off people, too.  
Hovan said: —You are welcome, thousand times.  
I know you will take your father's place.  
Mher asked: —Who is annoying you, Uncle?  
Hovan said: —The [four] grandsons of Gosbad,  
The four grandsons are like four beasts.  
—I will go and capture them, said Mher;  
Shall I kill them or bring them alive?  
—Do as you will, said Hovan,  
Either kill them or bring them alive.

Next morning, Mher mounted Kourkig Jelaly  
And rode to Lerra Dasht.  
He saw Gosbad's four grandsons riding toward him.  
When they saw Mher, they shot at him.  
An arrow hit Kourkig Jelaly's hoof  
And was embedded in it.  
Mher struck the arrow with his Lightning Sword,  
Cut off half of it; the other half remained in the hoof.  
He captured the four grandsons  
[363] And brought them to his uncle.  
Kourkig Jelaly raised his wounded hoof,  
Uncle Hovan, seeing the wound, asked:  
—What happened to your horse's hoof?  
He looked at it  
And saw a part of an arrow lodged in the hoof.  
Uncle Hovan took gem hyacinth and emeralds,

Melted them, and poured the ointment into the wound.  
The hoof healed, became stronger than it was before.

Mher took the four grandsons of Gosbad,  
He nailed two of them on one side  
And two on the other side of the gate.

Then he mounted Kourkig Jelaly and  
Started on his way back to Kohar Khanum.  
He rode on and on ...  
[On the way] He met the sons of the King of Aleppo—  
Forty pahlevan brothers riding on camels.  
They came to Mher, exchanged greetings,  
And said to him:  
—We are forty brothers;  
If you join us, we will be forty-one brothers.  
Mher said: —I will be a brother of yours.  
But tell me, what city do you come from?  
—From Aleppo, they said.  
—What are you doing here? asked Mher.  
—We have a sister, they said,  
Who has seized our father's throne  
And driven us away.  
She is ruling our land.  
Mher said: —Take me to her.  
I want to see what kind of a sister she is  
Who rules your land.  
They said: —If you want to know,  
[364] Our sister was born a cannibal.  
She has devoured our father and mother  
And the entire population of the city.

Mher went, seized the cannibal witch—  
The sister of the forty pahlevans—  
And with one blow struck off her head.  
Then he went to the forty pahlevans and told them:  
—I killed your cannibal sister,  
You can return to your city.  
They kissed Mher's hands and feet and said to him:  
—We could not destroy that witch;  
Now that you have killed her and saved our lives,  
You can have the kingdom of our land if you wish,  
We will be your servants to the day of our death.  
—I don't want anything from you, Mher said,  
I don't want to be a king,  
I don't want to be the lord of any city,  
I am Mher, the son of David of Sassoun,  
I cannot stay here,  
I can have no heir, I have no death.

4.

From Aleppo Mher rode on until he reached Baghdad.  
He saw an aged man sitting by the road,  
Mher asked: —What is going on in Baghdad?

Who is the King of Baghdad?  
The man said: —I do not know the king,  
But they say he is a grandson of the Khalif.  
Mher then asked: —Where is the tomb of Baghdasar?  
—It is across from the king's palace, he said.  
Mher said:  
—Baghdasar is my kinsman from the House of Sassoun,  
Will you point his tomb to me?  
He pointed it out, took him there, Mher saw it.  
[365] Mher dismounted his horse [while] in the garden,  
Prostrated himself before the tomb,  
Offered a prayer. —The imprint of his hands  
Can be seen where he has prayed.  
Mher left Baghdad, rode on  
Until he reached the city of Gezir.  
There is a river, named Gezir-Shat,  
That flows through the city of Gezir;  
One hundred and forty rivulets meet  
And flow into this river.  
Gezir-Shat had deluged the city three times.  
Mher came there, brought a huge rock,  
Dropped it into the river at the center of the city.  
The river was divided into two branches;  
One branch flows on one side  
And the other branch on the other side.  
The city was never deluged again.  
On that rock Mher then built Brcha-Balak,  
The fortress that can never be destroyed.

From Gezir Mher rode on to his home  
In the city of King Bajig.  
He found his mace hanging on the door as he had left it.  
No one had entered his house.  
Mher went inside  
And found his wife, Kohar, dead on the couch.  
He took her hand and saw it held a letter,  
In which she had written:  
—When you return and find me here,  
I beg you, carry me back to Sassoun  
And bury me beside Khantout Khanum.

Mher took up Kohar's body  
And carried it back to his home, Sassoun.  
There he found that his uncle had passed away, too.  
He built a tomb and buried Kohar beside Khantout.  
[366] Then he had, forty masses sung,  
Masses also for the repose of the souls  
Of all the dead of the House of Sassoun.  
He started to leave,  
But he found the earth would not sustain his steps.  
He turned back, went to his mother's tomb and pleaded:  
[Chanting:]  
—Mother mine, arise; Mother mine, arise,  
I am Mher, the child of your breast;

You carried me near your heart for nine months  
And endured much suffering on earth.  
Without aim I roamed the world endlessly  
And did not find a mother as dear as you.

A voice came from his mother's tomb:

[Chanting:]

—What can I do, my son, what can I do?  
Feature and complexion are faded away from my face,  
Light is vanished from my eyes,  
Serpent and scorpion nestle over me;  
You have roamed the world enough.  
You have roamed the world enough . . .  
Akraḡou Kar [Crow's Rock] is your haven,  
Go to Akraḡou Kar.

Mher wept and wept.

No further sound came from the tomb of his mother.  
He then went to his father's tomb, wept and pleaded:

—Father mine, arise; Father mine, arise,  
I belong no more to the great House of Sassoun.  
I belong to this world no more.  
Father mine, arise; Father mine, arise,  
[367] M'rmour snow is fallen today,  
Your son Mher's feet are in m'rmour pain,  
Father mine, arise; Father mine, arise,  
I have been longing for your fragrant presence,  
I have been longing for your soothing words,  
And wandering the world in loneliness.

A voice came from the tomb of his father:

[Chanting:]

—What can I do, my son? What can I do?  
Feature and complexion are faded away from my face,  
Light is vanished from my eyes,  
Serpent and scorpion nestle over me;  
You have roamed the world enough,  
You have roamed the world enough . . .  
Akraḡou Kar is your haven.  
When the world is destroyed and rebuilt,  
When the ground can sustain your horse,  
Then the world will be yours.

He wept and wept,

No further sound came from the tomb of his father.

Mher rode to Vosdanah Gaban.

As he arrived at Vosdanah Gaban,

[368] The prince of that city lassoed and captured Mher.

Mher, tethered with his horse, invoked:

—In the name of the Bread and Wine, the Eternal Lord,  
And High Madonna of Marout,  
And struck [with his sword], cut the bonds,  
And set Kourkig Jelaly free.

He then pleaded with God  
Either to give him another combat  
Or release his soul.

God then sent seven angels, mounted on horse,  
To combat Mher.  
They fought from midday to nightfall.  
Mher wielded his Lightning Sword,  
But the sword would not smite the angels,  
And the earth would not sustain Kourkig Jelaly;  
His hoofs would sink into the ground.  
The ground had lost its firmness  
And would not sustain Mher.  
—Hai, hoy! It is in vain, said Mher,  
The ground is grown old and weary, too;  
It can no longer sustain the hoofs of my horse.  
From midday to nightfall he struggled to ride on,  
But Kourkig Jelaly's hoofs kept sinking into the earth.  
Mher dismounted and led the horse  
To the foot of a mountain near Van,  
Where he saw a rock.  
People call this rock the Rock of Van.  
Mher then said to himself:  
—Let me strike the rock with my sword:  
If my sword cuts the rock, I am not guilty;  
If it does not, I am guilty.  
As he struck it with his Lightning Sword,  
[369] The rock split in two.  
Mher and Kourkig Jelaly rode in,  
The rock came together and closed them in.

Kerry Toros died of grief  
When he heard that Mher was confined in the rock.

## Epilogue

They say that twice a year  
The rock splits open,  
Once on Vardavar,  
Once on Hambartzoum.  
As the rock splits open,  
Mher on his Kourkig Jelaly rides out,  
Roams over rocky ground  
And covers the distance of forty days in one hour.  
But when he touches ground,  
The hoofs of the horse sink in again.  
Unable to ride on, Mher turns back [to the rock].  
They say that on the eve of Hambartzoum,  
A shepherd goes to Akravou Kar,  
The rocks splits open,  
The shepherd walks in and sees  
A huge man sitting there.

The shepherd asks:

—Mher, when will you come out of this place?

Mher replies:

—If I come out of this place,

The earth will not sustain me.

I will not stay on earth

While the world is wicked

And the ground is false.

When the wicked world is destroyed and rebuilt,

[371] When the wheat grows to the size of a rose-pod,

When the barley grows to the size of a walnut,

It is only then that

I and my horse will be allowed to leave.

As the shepherd leaves,

The rock comes together.

It is said that on every Friday

Water drips from the rock.

That water, they say, drips from Kourkig Jelaly;

And travelers passing by the rock on Fridays

Hear the neighing of Kourkig Jelaly.

[372]

We pray for mercy on Dzovinar,

Forty mercies for Sanasar.

We pray for mercy on Baghdasar,

Forty mercies for Deghtzoun Dzam.

We pray for mercy on Kerry Toros,

Forty mercies for Tzenov Hovan.

We pray for mercy on Medz Mher,

Forty mercies for Armaghan.

A thousand mercies on stalwart David,

Forty mercies for Khantout Khanum.

We pray for mercy on Pokr Mher,

Forty mercies for Kohar Khanum.

We pray for mercy, forty mercies,

For our master—the great minstrel—

Who told us this tale;

We pray for mercy, a thousand mercies,

For the souls of the parents of those

Who are listening to this tale.

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# David of Sassoun

## Glossary

(Armenian and foreign words recurring frequently throughout the epic.)

AKRAVOU KAR—Crow's Rock or Rock of Van. The cave where Pokr Mher is confined.

APPO JAN—A friendly form of address, literally meaning "Brother, my soul."

AZNAHOUR—Giant, brave man. (*Azn*: race; *hour/hur*: fire. A man of fiery race.)

AZNANTZORDY—People belonging to a race of brave warriors of noble birth.

AZNAVOUR—Derived from Aznahour: giant, brave man.

BABIG—An affectionate appellation: "Dear elderly father."

BGHNTZEH KAGHAK —Copper City. A mythical city.

CHAN—An affectionate, friendly form of addressing. Literal meaning: "(my) soul."

CHOCHANTZ DOUN—The House of Grandees.

DEGHTZOUN DZAM—Golden Locks.

DEV—Evil earthly beings or evil spirits in Armenian mythology, endowed with supernatural strength, stamina.

GATNAGHBIUR (*Gatn-aghbiur*)—Milky fountain, in literal translation, famous for its water of supernatural properties.

GATNOV AGHBIUR—Same as Gatnaghbiur.

HALAL (Arabic)—Rightful, lawful, legitimate.

HALVOR—A dialectal term used for addressing, with a sense of veneration, gray-haired, elderly men.

HARAM (Arabic)—Unlawful, dishonest.

HARISSA—A thick porridge of lamb's meat and wheat served to those attending a memorial service.

HERAHOD—A reverential form of addressing a close kin who nurtures fatherly care and affection.

JAN (Persian)—Same as Chan.

KAMY—Wind: one of the forces of nature under the mythological or supernatural man's control.

Metaphorically used for speed.

KATCHER [plural of *kach/kaj*]—In Armenian mythology, a race of mortals endowed with magic powers, such as casting, lifting spells, taking on other than human forms, etc.

KAZ or ALEP KAZ—A measure, 112 centimeters or about 3 Ms feet.

KERRY—A maternal uncle, mother's brother.

KHALIF—A word of Arabic origin, used by minstrels of the Middle East for the word king.

KHANOUM—A word of Turkish origin, implying nobility or high social status for women.

KHATOUN—Same as Khanoum.

KHOLBASHY—A compound word of Turkish derivation, meaning the head, the captain, of the military guard.

KOURSY—(Heat box) A large, wooden cubic frame with a solid wooden top and a brazier of embers at the bottom. The frame is covered with a large quilt. To keep warm, people sit around it, extend their feet to the brazier inside the frame and cover themselves with the quilt. The word is derived from Kiursy (Arabic): a sofa, throne.



KROGH—A scribe, a writer. A relentless, grim figure in Armenian mythology who scribes (issues) the death warrant of human beings.

MADAGH—A memorial meal, prepared from the meat of the sacrificial lamb.

MAIDAN (Arabic)—An open field for sporting games, as used in the epic.

MAMMIG—An affectionate term in which strangers address elderly and motherly women.

MELIK—A ruling master (of Arabic derivation).

MSR—An Arabic term, meaning 'Grand City,' not 'Egypt' as erroneously translated by others on the basis of a phonetic similarity between 'Mussur (Egypt) and 'Msr' (Grand City) at the eastern bend of the historic Fertile Crescent, in ancient Assyria.

NANA—An informal, friendly term in which younger people address elderly women.

PAHLEVAN—A hero, brave warrior, having attained national distinction. Firdousi used this word in his *Shahnameh* for identifying the national heroes, the pahlevans, of the Pahlevies.

SASSOUN [Sasun]—A dialectal word derived from the word Sassoum, by implication standing for awe, enormousness. Sassoun then would mean awesome, enormous, stupendous.

SAZ—An oriental, wooden musical instrument, with a long neck and thin copper strings played with a pick.

TARLAN—Stalwart, daring, intrepid, dauntless, falconlike.

TENDOUR (TENDOOR)—A large, hollow clay cylinder, wide at the bottom, sunken in the ground to make fire, bake flat bread, and cook food in Middle Eastern homes.

TIZ—An oriental hand measure, the span of a stretched hand, 24-25 centimeters.

TZENOV HOVAN—Voiceful Hovan. Hovan with a powerful voice.

VARDAPET—A doctor of the Armenian Church.

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